

The PlayStation Book

NEW



100% UNOFFICIAL



INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING GAMES

- GRAN TURISMO
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- METAL GEAR SOLID
- TOMB RAIDER
- CRASH BANDICOOT

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTOR'S GUIDE TO THE PLAYSTATION

Welcome to The PlayStation Book™

Sony's PlayStation changed everything. It was originally devised as a project with Nintendo, but Sony soon forged ahead by itself when its rival made other plans. The end result was an astonishingly ambitious piece of hardware that truly brought gaming to the masses. Of course, videogames were popular long before the PlayStation came along, but the PlayStation shifted insane units of hardware. Sony had \$2 billion in capital to ensure the PlayStation was a success and its powerful hardware was able to court a large number of developers, from Namco to Capcom, Electronic Arts and Activision. Virtually all the big players wanted to play on Sony's field and Sony was more than happy to let them join in. In short it was a revelation and it changed gaming forever. With that in mind, we've scoured the last ten years of **Retro Gamer** to bring you amazingly in-depth articles on some of the system's biggest games, as well as looking at the console itself. It's the perfect way to celebrate one of Sony's greatest achievements.



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The PlayStation Book™

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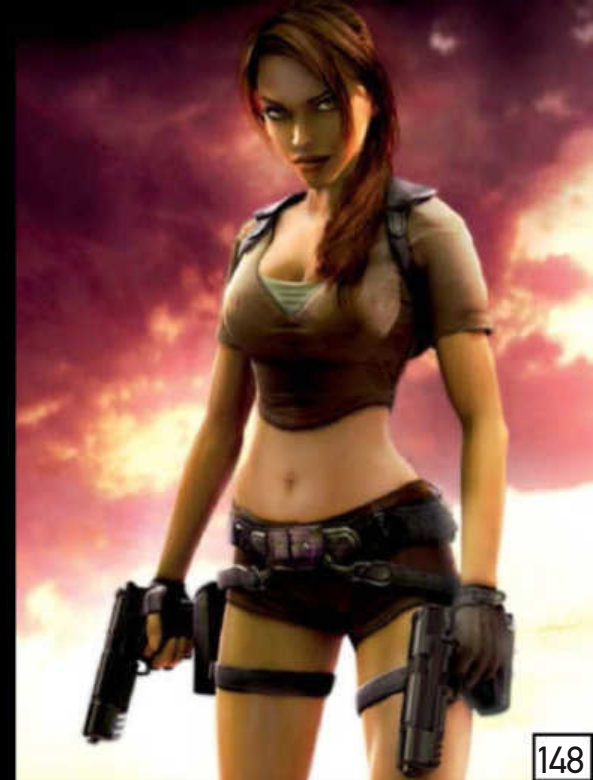
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The game dance mats were made for





PlayStation

THE NAME PLAYSTATION HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH VIDEOGAMING, BUT SONY'S ROUTE INTO THE INDUSTRY WAS ANYTHING BUT STRAIGHTFORWARD. JOIN DAMIEN MCFERRAN AS HE CHARTS THE HISTORY OF WHAT IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSOLES OF ALL TIME

It's almost impossible to conceive it now, but prior to the 32-bit PlayStation's launch in 1994 there were real doubts in the media over its chances. Over 100 million hardware sales later, such pessimism seems woefully misplaced, but it's easy to forget just how many hurdles Sony had to overcome to make a success of its first piece of videogames hardware – and media scepticism was the least of those problems.

The PlayStation concept actually has its roots way back even before the 16-bit generation had hit the marketplace – 1988, to be precise. Always thinking a few steps ahead of its rivals, Nintendo was actively courting manufacturers to create some kind of expanded storage device for its Super NES console, which was in development and due to hit the market in just over a year. Sony – in conjunction with Dutch electronics giant Philips – was working on a new format called CD-ROM/XA, a new type of compact disc that allowed simultaneous access to audio, visual and computer data, making it thoroughly compatible with the medium of interactive entertainment. Because Sony was already being contracted to produce the SPC-700 sound processor for the SNES, Nintendo decided to enlist the electronics manufacturer's assistance in producing a CD-ROM add-on for its 16-bit console.

For Sony, it was a dream come true. Having been instrumental in the production of the ill-fated MSX computer format, the firm never hid its desire to become a key player in the burgeoning videogame business. Therefore, an alliance with what was unquestionably the biggest and most famous name in the industry would not only help elevate Sony's standing; it would also enable the company to set the wheels in motion for its ultimate plan: to put its consumer electronics experience

to good use and produce its own videogame hardware. The industry was growing at an alarming rate thanks largely to Nintendo's hugely successful NES and Game Boy systems, and Sony was keen to obtain a foothold.

The initial agreement between the two firms was that Sony would produce a CD-ROM expansion for the existing SNES hardware and would have licence to produce games for that system. Later, it was supposed, Sony would be permitted to produce its own all-in-one machine – dubbed PlayStation – which would play both SNES carts and CD-ROM games. The format used by the SNES-based version of the PlayStation was called 'Super Disc', and Sony made sure that it held the sole international rights – in other words, it would profit handsomely from every single SNES CD-ROM title that was sold. It was a match made in heaven: Sony would instantly gain a potentially massive installed base of users overnight as the SNES was a dead cert to sell millions of units. SNES users would upgrade to the new CD-ROM add-on when they knew that Nintendo's cutting-edge games would be coming to it, and Sony would make money on each software sale. What's more, once the all-in-one PlayStation was launched, Sony would gain even more in the way of profits and become a key player in the videogame industry. The man behind this audacious scheme was Ken Kutaragi, the engineer also responsible for producing the aforementioned SNES sound chip.

However, behind the scenes Nintendo was predictably far from happy with the proposed arrangement. It was very protective of its licensing structure, which allowed it to extract massive royalties from third-party publishers. Allowing Sony leverage in this sector would only damage Nintendo's profitability; the Kyoto-based veteran reasoned that it should be making the majority of the profit on SNES CD sales, not Sony. The plan – if it came to fruition – would ultimately benefit Sony far more than Nintendo: the former would merely be using the latter as a way of getting a ready-made market share and would eventually become

SPECIFICATIONS BOX

Year released:

1994 (Japan), 1995 (US/Europe)

Original price: ¥39,800 (Japan), \$299.99 (US), £299.99 (UK)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated magazines:

PlayStation Plus, Official PlayStation Magazine, Play

Why the PlayStation was great...

Some would argue that the videogame industry in the mid-Nineties was in dire need of a boot up the backside, and the PlayStation delivered this kick. Technologically groundbreaking and supported by a wide range of third-party developers, the machine is home to countless classic titles. While some of these games have aged badly, most remain just as essential today as they were over a decade ago.



INSTANT EXPERT

■ The Sony PlayStation is the first videogames console to sell over 100 million units worldwide

■ *Gran Turismo* is the system's bestselling title, with 10.85 million copies sold

■ The PlayStation can generate 360,000 flat-shaded polygons per second

■ With only 2MB of main RAM, the PlayStation struggled with 2D titles that required lots of animation frames, while its rival the Saturn fared better thanks to the fact that it had twice the amount of memory and could be expanded still further with a separate cartridge

■ Approximately 7,900 different games were produced for the PlayStation during its 11-year lifespan

■ Cumulatively-speaking, PlayStation software sales stand at an astonishing 962 million units worldwide

■ Each Sony Memory Card came with 128KB of storage for save game data. Higher capacity third-party cards were also available

■ The console's impressive sound processor can handle 24 channels of audio

■ Early versions of the machine were afflicted with skipping FMV and sound, thanks to the poorly designed nature of the CD drive. Later models rectified this issue, but early adopters still shudder at the memory of having to place their beloved consoles upside down in order to get them to work properly

■ Early UK adverts for the machine featured SAPS – the Society Against PlayStation – a fictional organisation that was committed to preventing the console from ensnaring the country's youngsters

► a determined rival as a result. Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi was famous for being particularly ruthless in his business practices, but what happened next is one of the most infamous double-crosses in the history of the videogame industry.

It was at the 1991 Consumer Electronics Show that Nintendo dropped the bombshell. Sony went to the event full of enthusiasm and on the first day proudly announced the details of its new alliance with Nintendo, as well as news of the Super Disc format and the impending development of the SNES-compatible PlayStation. Sony had less than 24 hours to soak up the palpable level of excitement generated by this press conference before Nintendo confirmed that it was, in fact, working with Philips on the SNES CD-ROM drive. Yamauchi had gone behind Sony's back at the last minute to broker a deal with the Dutch company – a deal that was predictably skewed in Nintendo's favour – leaving Sony publicly humiliated at the very moment it had expected to usher in a new era as a serious contender in the videogaming arena. At the time, Yamauchi and the rest of Nintendo's top brass were suitably pleased with their skulduggery; such swift action had prevented Sony from taking a sizeable bite out of the company's profits. As it happened, the planned Nintendo-Philips alliance resulted in little more than a handful of risible Nintendo licences on the CD-i, and the abject failure of Sega's Mega-CD seemed to lend credence to the viewpoint that expanding existing consoles was a mistake, so while Nintendo had protected its best interests by leaving Sony at the altar in such degrading fashion, it actually gained little else of note – aside from a dogged rival.



► Although SNK's Neo Geo system had used the same concept some years beforehand, Sony's decision to go with removable data storage for save game files was regarded by many as truly groundbreaking.

Sony had, by this point, poured a significant amount of cash into the proposed PlayStation concept. It had even moved as far as the prototype phase, with PC CD-ROM titles such as Trilobyte's *The 7th Guest* being mooted as possible launch games. Despite the tumultuous events of the 1991 CES, a deal was signed between Nintendo and Sony that would allow the latter to make its machine compatible with SNES CD-ROM titles – with the proviso that Nintendo would retain all software royalties. Although it was nothing more than a clever stalling tactic by Nintendo to keep Sony from entering the market on its own, this proposed alliance nevertheless kept the increasingly frustrated Kutaragi and his team busy. However, by 1992 it had become clear that such a union was going nowhere. Sony cut off communication with Nintendo and the company was painfully close to withdrawing from the arena for good.

Only Kutaragi's intense resolve and determination prevented the PlayStation dream from ending in 1992. During a meeting with Sony president Norio Ohga in order to decide the future of the project, Kutaragi made bold claims about the kind of machine he had been developing. He argued that the 16-bit PlayStation, with its reliance on a union with the incumbent – not to mention untrustworthy – Nintendo, was a dead end. The only option was to go it alone and create a brand new piece of hardware capable of shifting 3D graphics at a hitherto unprecedented rate. When Kutaragi's ambitious proposal was greeted with derision from the Sony president, he presented another side to his argument: could Sony's pride allow it to simply walk away when Nintendo had so blatantly abused its trust? By making



VARIANTS PLAYSTATION'S MANY FACES

SNES PlayStation

■ The fruit of Sony and Nintendo's ill-fated union, this machine would have played SNES carts and SNES CD-ROM software. Although it was never officially released, it formed the basis of the 32-bit machine. Legend has it that Sony still has 200 prototype units secreted within its Japanese headquarters.



Sony PlayStation

■ The groundbreaking original. This piece of hardware kick-started an era of Sony-led market dominance that would last for the best part of a decade. Early units suffered from skipping FMV and CD audio thanks to their entirely plastic CD-ROM mechanism; later versions had metal parts that fixed the issue.



Net Yaroze

■ Aimed at bedroom coders, the Net Yaroze came with development tools that allowed users to create their own games, some of which turned up on official demo discs. It also had no regional lockout, so games from any part of the world could be played on it. Naturally, it was far more expensive than the standard PlayStation.



PSone

■ Released in 2000, this revised machine was smaller than its predecessor, clocking in at a minuscule 38x193x144mm. An official LCD screen accessory could be attached to make this the first portable PlayStation, albeit without an official battery. It outsold the PS2 in its first year on sale.



► UK gamers were treated to the amusing "Society Against PlayStation" advertising campaign, complete with its dorky spokesman.





COMMUNITY THE BEST PLAYSTATION RESOURCES ON THE WEB

The PlayStation Museum

playstationmuseum.com

■ A truly amazing site that is dedicated to preserving the history of Sony's machine. Here you will find reviews and features, as well as lots of data relating to unreleased titles or prototypes. Well worth a visit if you have a few hours to spare.



PlayStation DataCenter

psxdatacenter.com

■ A must for collectors, the PlayStation DataCenter has listings for almost every game released on the format. It even has high-quality cover scans to download. A real gold mine of information for dedicated PlayStation fans.



Push Square

pushsquare.com

■ While it's not strictly aimed at the PSone, Push Square is nevertheless one of the net's leading Sony sites. It covers retro-related news items as well as the PlayStation's offspring. If you're a Sony fanboy, then you should bookmark this site for sure.



Absolute PlayStation

absolute-playstation.com

■ Another site that covers the entire PlayStation brand, Absolute PlayStation is packed with reviews, guides, blogs and even a chat forum. It's also regularly updated with the latest and greatest Sony games, so if Sony is your passion, this is the place to be.



» *PaRappa The Rapper* was one of the first music action titles and helped kick-start the recent explosion in rhythm-based gaming.



» *Final Fantasy VII* was one of the PlayStation's most significant releases, not just in commercial terms but from a critical viewpoint as well. It became the first JRPG to gain truly international acceptance.

▶ the PlayStation project a success, the company would experience the sweet taste of revenge at the expense of its one-time ally.

Kutaragi's speech hit a nerve, and early in 1994 Sony confirmed that it was entering the videogame arena with its own console, and even formed subsidiary Sony Computer Entertainment in order to oversee the new venture. Keen to differentiate this new project from its previous namesake, Sony branded it the 'PlayStation-X' – this gave rise to the abbreviation 'PSX', which is still used even today, even though the 'X' was later dropped when the console was officially launched. Early reports were impressive, with some developers confidently proclaiming that Sony's console would blow away the competition. Despite the company's wide entertainment portfolio – which included music label CBS Records and Hollywood studio Columbia Tri-Star – Sony boldly decided not to focus on the multimedia market, as its rival Philips, with its CD-i and 3DO, had done, to its great cost. Instead, the PlayStation was unashamedly proclaimed as a dedicated

gaming machine, with SCE's director Akira Sato confidently stating that: "If it's not real-time, it's not a game" – a thinly veiled criticism of other CD-based consoles and their reliance on FMV titles that featured live actors but little interaction. The sheer power of the new system shocked other players in the industry; Sega of Japan president Hayao Nakayama was reportedly so furious when he read the specs for the

When you take into account Sony's position as one of the world's foremost electronics manufacturers, it's hardly surprisingly that the original PlayStation was a highly desirable piece of kit. Unmistakably a games console but showcasing a hint of mature design, the machine seemed to speak to those gamers who had cut their teeth on the likes of the NES, Mega Drive and SNES and were now ready to progress to

the videogames market very seriously indeed. Kutaragi – and the entire project in general – had come under fire from high-level Sony executives who argued that videogames were toys for children, and therefore, one of the PlayStation's key aims was to challenge that view. As a result, the final design for the machine was sleek and serious, mimicking the appearance of a top-end piece of audio-visual equipment rather than a games-playing device.

However, while this posturing caught the attention of gamers, some industry experts were less enthused, citing Sony's poor track record in the industry up to that point. The company's software publishing arm – Sony Imagesoft – had so far failed to generate any titles of note, pushing half-baked movie licences such as *Cliffhanger* and *Last Action Hero* onto store shelves to the complete indifference of the games-buying public. Indeed, software was one area in which Sony was at a distinct disadvantage, as Sega and Nintendo had highly talented internal development teams that traditionally produced the best software for their respective consoles. Sony

“ By making it a success, Sony would experience revenge at the expense of its one-time ally ”

PlayStation that he personally visited Sega's hardware division and gave them a stern talking to. His tirade would result in the Saturn, Sega's entrant in the 32-bit console war, getting an additional video processor to boost its graphical muscle, but this would make the system harder to program for – an issue that had severe ramifications in the future.

an entirely different level of challenge. Everything from the two-pronged joypads to the removable Memory Card storage system seemed to drip sophistication. Sony later revealed the numerous hardware designs that had been considered before the final version was decided upon; this was the work of a company that was taking its entry into

Developer Viewpoint

Robert Troughton (programmer, *Destruction Derby*)

■ "IT WAS LATE in 1994 that Sony – and myself – were launching into the console games business. Straight out of university, I wasn't really sure what to expect. Reflections, a game developer based in the North East, were just beginning work on a new genre of racing game: *Destruction Derby*. The premise was simple: a racing game which you win not by coming first – although that helped – but by smashing your competitors' cars to a pulp. From starting in January '95, we had only nine months to complete the project, with a team consisting of just three programmers and one artist. The PlayStation was technically leagues ahead of the competition, with amazing 3D graphics and CD-ROM technology. I can't remember whether any of us saw daylight for those nine months, but I'm not sure that any of us cared all that much. Sony loved us for how fast we were creating the game – they gave us a release date that would tie in with the PlayStation's US and European launch – the press were all over us and it was clear that the game was going to be a success. *Destruction Derby* went on to sell millions. The PlayStation sold many times more, and I've stayed in the industry ever since, still doing what I was doing back then: hacking away at code and trying to squeeze every last bit of juice out of whatever platform I'm working on – and thankful to Sony for giving me this opportunity."



Station to Station



■ RELEASED LATE IN the machine's lifespan, the PocketStation was a self-contained handheld similar in design to Sega's Dreamcast Visual Memory Unit. Its announcement caused a surprising degree of excitement, and many industry insiders confidently predicted that this miniature console was Sony's attempt to crack Nintendo's stranglehold on the handheld market. Dubbed a "personal digital assistant", it stored save game data just like a typical PlayStation Memory Card but could also play crude games on its 32x32 dot matrix LCD display, although, predictably, the quality of these titles was well below what could be experienced on Nintendo's Game Boy. An infrared connection was also included so users could exchange data without having to connect their PocketStations to their main console. Launched in 1999, it was only supported by a handful of titles and sadly never saw release outside Japan – although a release was obviously on the drawing board at some juncture as several Western games came with PocketStation functionality.

► lacked this key feature, although it was at least attempting to rectify the issue by courting highly rated UK code shop Psygnosis, which would go on to publish vital launch titles such as *WipEout* and *Destruction Derby*. Still, there was an overwhelming feeling that although Sony was perceived to be doing everything right, it would ultimately fall at the final hurdle; Sega and Nintendo would continue to fight it out, just as they had done during the previous format war. 'Sony doesn't know games,' the critics cried. Thankfully, the firm managed to secure the assistance of a company that certainly did know something about the industry: Japanese arcade veteran Namco.

Pac-Man creator Namco was undergoing something of a resurgence thanks to the incredible impact made by its 3D coin-op *Ridge Racer*. A texture-mapped tour de force, the game was unquestionably a cutting-edge piece of

programming and had given its parent company the ability to leapfrog persistent rival Sega in arcades. When Namco revealed that it was porting its hugely successful racer to the PlayStation, it caused quite a stir. The notion that Sony's new console could replicate an arcade title that cost thousands of pounds created astonishing levels of expectation, and this only increased when the first shots of PSX-based *Ridge Racer* were released to the public. Coded in an incredible six months, the game might not have been arcade-perfect, but it did enough to cement Sony's position as a key player, purely because it made Sega's heavily delayed in-house conversion of its *Daytona USA* coin-op look decidedly second-rate by comparison. Elsewhere, the PlayStation's visual prowess was demonstrated by exquisite third-party titles such as *Jumping Flash* and *Battle Arena Toshinden*, the former being a groundbreaking, if shallow, 3D platformer and the latter a likeable, if uninspired, one-on-one brawler. *Toshinden* couldn't hold a candle to Sega's *Virtua Fighter* port when it came to gameplay, but it was nevertheless a fundamental game in Sony's arsenal because it looked far, far better. From screenshots alone, it was clear that the PlayStation had the edge in terms of raw power.

The Japanese launch took place on 3 December 1994 – a handful of days after Sega had shifted 200,000 Saturn consoles on its first day of sale. Priced at

¥39,800 (around £250 in today's money) the PlayStation sold strongly, although the Japanese public seemed to gravitate towards Sega's console more, possibly because *Virtua Fighter*, despite the slightly unimpressive Saturn conversion, was the country's number one arcade title at the time. Both formats started out fairly evenly, but as the months rolled by Sony was able to deliver on its promises thanks to sterling releases from Namco, Konami and Capcom, while Sega's in-house projects stalled. Ironically, Sony's reliance on third-party developers proved to be in its favour. Because it needed

outside assistance, the company had made great efforts to get software support, while it could be argued that Sega was less active in courting developers. Sony had made the PlayStation as accessible as possible, and it was paying dividends.

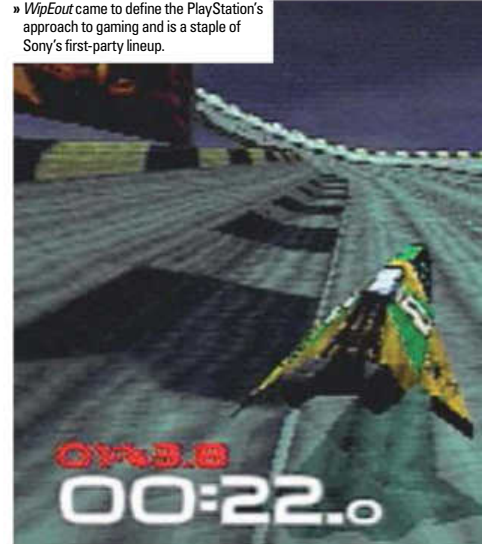
The technological gulf didn't do the PlayStation any harm, either; titles such

as *WipEout* looked gorgeous, with transparent textures and eye-popping flare effects. Sega's machine lacked both of these embellishments, and, thanks to its complex dual-CPU setup, required the best coders to really get the most out of it. Meanwhile, third-party studios were getting stuck in to PlayStation game production, and a string of classic titles began to emerge. *Tomb Raider* – ironically a Saturn title originally – along with *Tekken 2*, *Soul Blade*, *Ridge Racer Revolution* and *Resident Evil* all contributed to the PlayStation's wide and varied catalogue of titles.



► DMA's controversial *Grand Theft Auto* started its console life as a PlayStation release and made several appearances on the machine.

► *WipEout* came to define the PlayStation's approach to gaming and is a staple of Sony's first-party lineup.



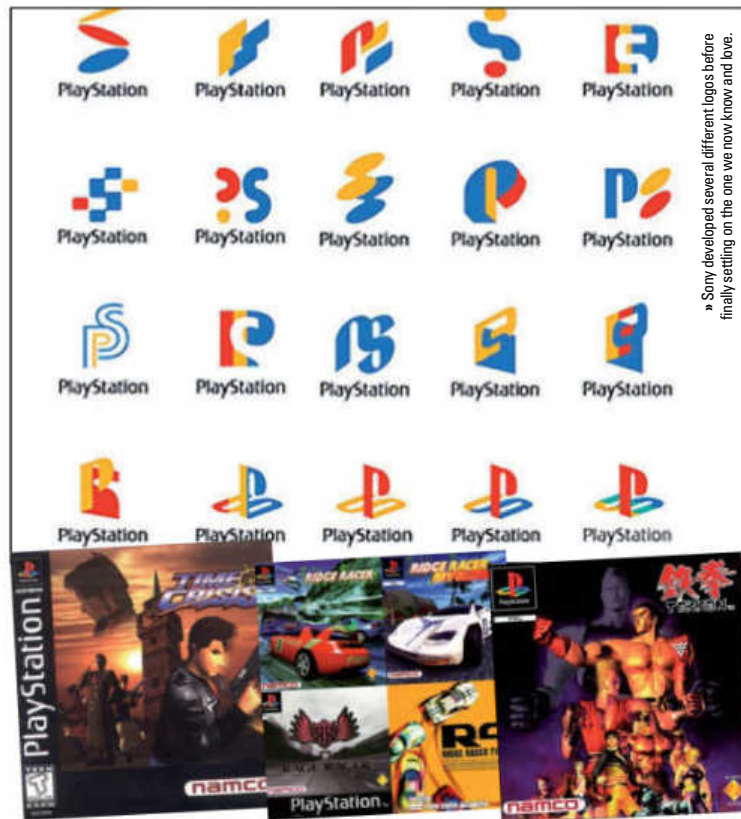
» Norio Ohga was Sony president during the genesis of the PlayStation project. He saw off apathy within the company to ensure that Kutaragi's dream came to fruition.



» *Nep Tuff Masters* is a fantastic golf game by Nazca, the same team responsible for *Metal Slug*. Like many AES games released in 1996, an authentic cartridge will cost you plenty.



» Fraternising with the enemy: Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto samples *Crash Bandicoot* during the 1996 E3 show.



» Sony developed several different logos before finally settling on the one we now know and love.

► The Western launches were equally successful, with Sony managing to undercut the retail price of Sega's Saturn in both North America and Europe. In Europe, especially, Sony displayed a masterly grasp of how to market a games machine to a more mature audience. The company knew that those gamers who had grown up with the 8-bit and 16-bit consoles were gradually reaching adulthood and would therefore require more 'grown-up' gaming experiences. While Sega and Nintendo focused on building recognisable mascots to appeal to youngsters, Sony released the PlayStation with a range of software that was unashamedly adult in tone: the aforementioned *Wipeout* featured a soundtrack that showcased the talents of real recording artists, such as The Chemical Brothers and Leftfield, while visceral top-down shooter *Loaded* not only featured excessive gore and allusions to transvestism but also enrolled the assistance of grebo-rock outfit Pop Will Eat Itself. One thing was clear: Sony wasn't aiming for the *Mario* and *Sonic* audience with the PlayStation.

Sega's challenge soon began to falter, and so Nintendo became Sony's next opponent. The firm responsible for such classics as *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda* had been making confident noises about its cartridge-based Ultra 64 (later Nintendo 64)

console for some time, and although it wouldn't be ready until 1996, Nintendo went to great lengths to encourage gamers to hold off on buying a 32-bit machine. Sadly, the decision to stick with the expensive cartridge format would cost the firm the support of one of its most prized third-party publishers: Squaresoft. Although the highly anticipated *Final Fantasy VII* had been confirmed as an N64 release, Square eventually switched development over to Sony's machine, citing the limited storage and high unit cost of cartridges. *Final Fantasy VII* was going to be the most epic game yet conceived, and it needed as much storage space as possible. Only CD-ROM could offer this, Square argued. Nintendo's loss was, of course, Sony's massive gain; published in 1997, *Final Fantasy VII* was a worldwide smash, selling 10 million copies in the process. This success established the console as the leading platform of its generation and subsequent system exclusives such as Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* and Polyphony Digital's seminal *Gran Turismo* cemented this lofty status even further.

With both Sega and Nintendo subdued, Sony's dominance was assured. So tight was the company's grip on the marketplace that even the launch of Sega's technically superior 128-bit Dreamcast in 1999 was unable to upset the status quo. With millions of

» Sony Europe's Phil Harrison was instrumental in attracting quality developers to the machine and would eventually rise to the top of the company.



units sold and a more powerful successor – the PlayStation 2 – waiting in the wings, 2000 saw Sony release a new iteration of its 32-bit console in the form of the PSone. Smaller, sleeker and sexier, it boasted enhanced functionality that allowed it to link to mobile phones and even supported a fold-down LCD display, giving it a small degree of portability. The revision was a triumph and enabled the ageing machine to remain relevant in a marketplace that was gradually leaving it behind in technological terms.

Sony ceased manufacturing the PlayStation in 2006, giving the console an impressive production lifespan of 11 years. During that time it redefined the world of videogames, granting gamers a taste of 3D visuals and making the oft-derided hobby a cool and relevant pastime. Of course, such activity earned Sony – and, by association, its console – a fair degree of scorn also, but few would have the temerity to debate the PlayStation's incredible influence on modern interactive entertainment. Without it, the gaming landscape today would be near-unrecognisable.

PlayStation

PERFECT TEN



TOMB RAIDER

- » RELEASE: 1996
- » PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
- » CREATOR: CORE DESIGN
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: FIGHTING FORCE

01 Although her star has waned a little over the past few years, there's no denying that Lara Croft remains one of videogaming's most enduring icons. Her 1996 debut was actually on the Saturn, as developer Core Design had traditionally supported Sega's consoles. However, it was the PlayStation version – released shortly afterwards – that was truly responsible for firing the delectable Miss Croft into the realms of global superstardom. Sequels followed as it firmly became a PlayStation series and arguably improved on the template, but the original game retains a near-legendary status.

GRAN TURISMO 2

- » RELEASE: 1999
- » PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- » CREATOR: POLYPHONY DIGITAL
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: OMEGA BOOST

02 The first *Gran Turismo* was possibly the most technically groundbreaking release of the 32-bit era, and this sequel beefed up the already considerable experience by adding more cars, more tracks and even a rally mode. The title's visuals – already pretty mind-blowing in the original release – pushed the 32-bit hardware to the absolute limit, with Polyphony Digital's unique development software eking out every last drop of power from the PlayStation in its final years. Spanning two discs, *Gran Turismo 2* is arguably the definitive racing title of that era and still plays great today.



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: SQUARE
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DEW PRISM

03 Released only in Japan and North America, this strategy RPG arrived around the same time as *Final Fantasy VII*, which caused some confusion when gamers discovered that they actually had very little in common. Developed by the team behind *Tactics Ogre* – Square snapped up studio Quest prior to producing the game – *Final Fantasy Tactics* showcases gorgeous visuals, breathtaking music and a surprisingly mature and complex plot. It was recently released on the PSP in a slightly enhanced form.

METAL GEAR SOLID

- » RELEASE: 1998
- » PUBLISHER: KONAMI
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER PRO

04 Hideo Kojima's magnum opus set a new high watermark for storytelling in videogames, as well as introducing an entire generation to the wonderful stealth sub-genre. Solid Snake has gone on to become a household name, starring in more technically impressive sequels on the PS2 and PS3 consoles. However, hardcore fans maintain that this instalment remains the best, thanks largely to its tight plotting, memorable characters and judicious use of the host hardware.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

- » RELEASE: 1998
- » PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: DINO CRISIS

05 The first title established Capcom's reputation as master of the 'survival horror' genre, but it was the second game in the series that truly confirmed the company's god-like status. Offering the ability to play the story with two different characters – one to each of the game's two discs, with differences depending on which you play first – *Resi 2* mixed relentless zombie slaughter with intriguing puzzles and some of the best visuals seen on the PlayStation up to that point. It's unsurprising that series fans hold this entry in the utmost regard.



GAMES

The original PlayStation brought us a massive number of franchises that have become part of the gaming landscape today. Just take a look at the following classics...



06

TEKKEN 3

- » RELEASE: 1998
- » PUBLISHER: NAMCO
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SOUL BLADE

06 *Tekken 2* had proven that Namco was more than capable of taking on Sega's illustrious *Virtua Fighter*, but it was the third game that dazzled the most. Sceptics had feared that it would never appear on the 32-bit console, but Namco's expert coders managed to squeeze in every aspect of the coin-op to create a fitting pugilistic swansong for the ageing PlayStation. While the Tekken Force and Tekken Ball modes were superfluous additions to the domestic port, all of the important features were present and correct.



07

EINHÄNDER

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: SQUARE
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: BRAVE FENCER MUSASHI

07 Famous for being Square's one and only entry in the shooter genre, *Einhänder* is an incredible achievement. The team involved had no previous experience with this type of game, yet it managed to create a classic that is still talked about in hushed, reverent tones even today. Featuring a unique weapon system based on grabbing the ordnance of fallen enemies, *Einhänder's* brilliance is made even more remarkable when you consider that Square hasn't ventured to the genre since its release.



08

FINAL FANTASY VII

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: SCE
- » CREATOR: SQUARE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SAGA FRONTIER

08 Having sold over 10 million copies worldwide, *Final Fantasy VII* needs no introduction. Cited as the game that sold the Japanese RPG to the Western mainstream, this three-disc epic made the most of the PlayStation's technical capabilities to deliver hours of turn-based entertainment. It remains arguably the most popular entry in Square's evergreen franchise and has recently spawned several spin-off games and other projects, such as *Crisis Core* on the PSP and the *Advent Children* CGI movie.



09

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

- » RELEASE: 1997
- » PUBLISHER: KONAMI
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: PROJECT OVERKILL

09 The PlayStation has a reputation for being something of a duffer when it comes to 2D titles, and to a certain extent, this is true. The console had only 2MB of RAM compared to the Saturn's 4MB, and this resulted in some lacklustre conversions. However, titles like *Symphony Of The Night* – coded with Sony's hardware in mind – were mind-blowing. Fusing 2D and 3D effects, Konami's designers created one of the most mesmerising titles of the generation. Look out for the limited edition European version, complete with art book and CD.

VAGRANT STORY

- » RELEASE: 2000
- » PUBLISHER: SQUARE
- » CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: FRONT MISSION 2

10 One of the most ambitious role-playing games of the 32-bit era, *Vagrant Story* is epic in every sense of the word. Produced by the same team responsible for *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the game featured a deep and sometimes disturbing storyline, and lead character Ashley Riot has to rank as one of the most hard-edged protagonists in videogame history. *Vagrant Story* was recently re-released on Sony's PlayStation Network and can be purchased and downloaded for play on both the PlayStation 3 and PSP, and it even lives on through its shared universe with the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series and *Final Fantasy XII*.



10

PlayStation

and the rest...

The PlayStation has one of the most interesting and diverse catalogues of games around. How many of the following have you experienced?

- 01 HOGS OF WAR
- 02 NO ONE CAN STOP MR DOMINO
- 03 BUBBLE BOBBLE FEATURING RAINBOW ISLANDS
- 04 FINAL FANTASY TACTICS
- 05 JUMPING FLASH
- 06 CRASH BANDICOOT
- 07 TOMB RAIDER
- 08 RESIDENT EVIL
- 09 METAL GEAR SOLID
- 10 ALUNDRA
- 11 GRAND THEFT AUTO
- 12 DOOM
- 13 ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE
- 14 HARMFUL PARK
- 15 AQUANAUT'S HOLIDAY
- 16 KULA WORLD
- 17 RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION
- 18 TIME CRISIS
- 19 RESIDENT EVIL 2
- 20 FINAL FANTASY VIII
- 21 PARAPPA THE RAPPER
- 22 BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN
- 23 DIE HARD TRILOGY
- 24 EINHANDER
- 25 RAYMAN
- 26 NBA JAM TOURNAMENT EDITION
- 27 TOMB RAIDER 2
- 28 PEPSI MAN
- 29 BOMBERMAN FANTASY RACE
- 30 DIABLO
- 31 THE DIVIDE: ENEMIES WITHIN
- 32 PORSCHE CHALLENGE
- 33 RAPID RELOAD
- 34 DESTRUCTION DERBY
- 35 CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- 36 STREET FIGHTER THE MOVIE
- 37 MEDAL OF HONOR
- 38 FINAL FANTASY VII
- 39 DEVIL DICE
- 40 TOMBI!
- 41 RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS
- 42 CONTRA: LEGACY OF WAR
- 43 RIDGE RACER
- 44 LSD: DREAM EMULATOR
- 45 DINO CRISIS
- 46 TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS
- 47 VIB RIBBON
- 48 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER
- 49 KILEAK THE BLOOD
- 50 TEKKEN 2
- 51 NIGHTMARE CREATURES
- 52 TOMB RAIDER 3
- 53 WIPEOUT
- 54 LEMMINGS
- 55 POWER DIGGERZ
- 56 TWISTED METAL





04



05



06



07



11



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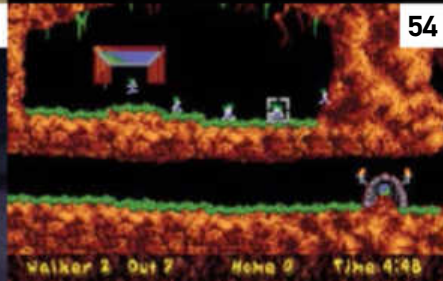
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HOW THE PlayStation

PlayStation CHANGED GAMING

It was the console that arguably killed the arcades, but revolutionised the way we played at home. David Crookes looks at why, 20 years on from its western launch, we shouldn't underestimate the power of PlayStation

In 2000, some six years after the PlayStation had launched in Japan and with the PS2 finding its way into the sweaty hands of smitten gamers, Phil Harrison, then senior vice president for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, spoke retrospectively of the ambition of the console brand that shook the dominance of Nintendo and Sega to its foundations.

At this point in time, Sega was months off throwing in the towel as its acclaimed yet largely shunned Dreamcast flopped in the shadow

of its Sony rival. The Nintendo 64 was about to be set aside in favour of the GameCube. Atari had long been cast into the wilderness as its final console, the Jaguar, was discontinued in 1994 and its name was on the verge of being sold by Hasbro Interactive to Infogrames.

But Harrison had a different company in mind when he reflected on the manner in which the PlayStation had cleaned up the opposition and made the fifth generation entirely its own. "We wanted it to become the Hoover of videogames," he said, of the aim to make the console late-comer a proprietary eponym. "And, in many ways, it has."

It is fair to say that no gaming machine up until that point had ever had the widespread, mass-market impact of the attractive, CD-playing grey plastic box of tricks that became the PlayStation, as controversial as that may sound. Countless amazing consoles had come before it, but none of them were able to truly break into the mainstream and



» Two decades ago we would have never predicted how important this logo would become.



» Although it catered for two players out of the box, it was possible to add more pads with a Multitap.

► none were able to say that, nine years and six months after launch, they had sold 100 million units. "I think really, the legacy of the original PlayStation is that it took gaming from a pastime that was for young people or maybe for slightly geeky people and it turned it into a highly credible form of mass entertainment, really comparable with great legitimacy with the music business and the movie business," says Sony's current European boss Jim Ryan.

Yet how did a console made by an outsider make such an impact? How did it become so successful that the stars of its games would adorn the covers of fashionable magazines? And why do people talk of the period between 1990 and 2000 as the era of the PlayStation Generation when the console wasn't even around for a good third of that time?



MARTYN BROWN

VIDEOGAME DEVELOPER AND CONSULTANT

"Back then it was all about 3D and especially the T-Rex demo that was doing the rounds – but we had our greatest PlayStation hit with a 2D game: *Worms*."

The answer is about to unfold. "I think Sony did a fantastic job in presenting PlayStation as a brand new way of playing and making games," explains Nick Burcombe, the lead designer of seminal title *WipEout*. "Sony's message about how powerful the PlayStation would be prior to launch did enough to get gamers looking at them, even though Sega's Dreamcast also had 3D capabilities and used discs too. Dreamcast was a good console but the message was loud and clear: PlayStation was even better. The message worked well."

The story of the PlayStation's origin has been well told. It's an intriguing tale of two companies; Sony and Nintendo striking a deal in 1988 to create a CD-ROM add-on to the SNES that would use Nintendo "Super Discs". Sony went further and added support for Video



PAUL RANSON

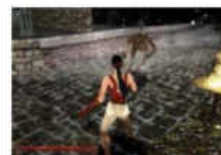
FORMERLY OF BIG RED

"Levels, cutscenes and music previously squished into carts could now be developed with panache and in a style that we thought emulated the movie business. PS1 for me was the proper start of the Hollywood style entertainment in the videogame business."

CDs and it took advantage of its permission to create its own standalone console which it called the Play Station (note the space), a machine that allowed for the playing of both CDs and cartridge. Sony showed off its creation to great fanfare at that year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in 1991.

But within mere hours of the unveiling Nintendo got cold feet. It believed Sony could potentially pull the rug from under them and steal a portion of the industry so it cancelled the deal, announcing the day after that it was instead bringing rival Philips on board. Eager not to waste the huge amount of time invested in the project, Sony's president Norio Ohga ordered that development would continue without the experience of Nintendo. Ken Kutaragi who had begun his career in Sony's digital research labs was given the task of designing the machine, which Sony codenamed PSX.

Kutaragi pooled the resources of engineers who had been working on a geometric computer graphics engine called System-G that was capable of real time 3D texture mapping for broadcasting networks. By 1992 he had a prototype ready to show his bosses, but it wasn't an easy ride for Kutaragi and his team. There was much internal resistance to the idea, with



» *Nightmare Creatures* tapped into the survival horror genre.



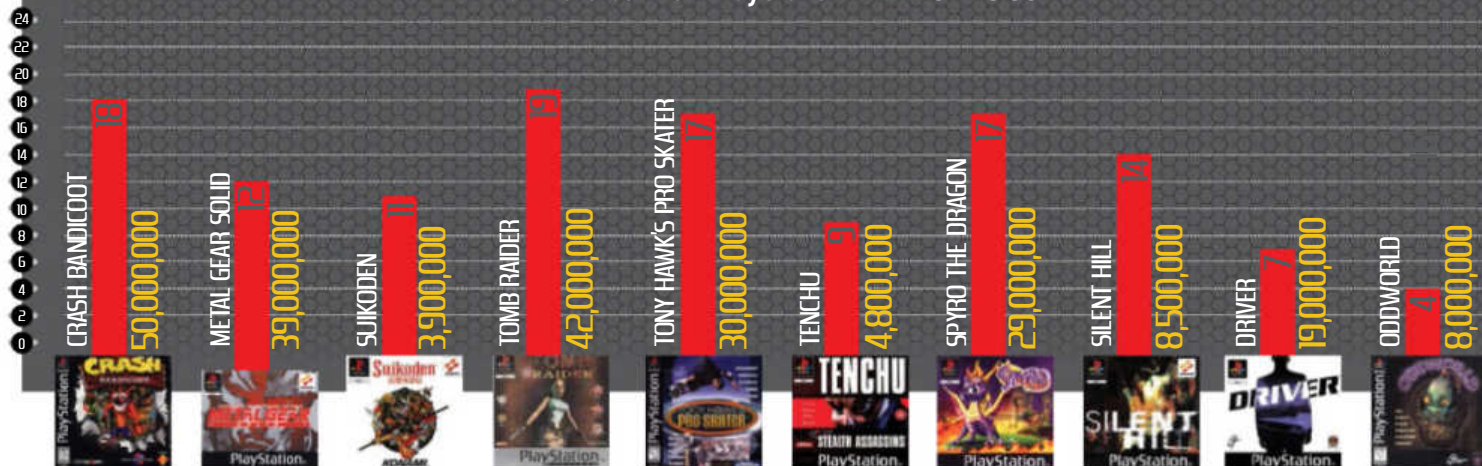
» Cliff Bleszinski's favourite ever PlayStation game is *Jumping Flash*.



» *Pandemonium* was an early platformer that used 2.5D.

PLAYSTATION BABIES

The classic gaming franchises that were born on PlayStation



HOW THE PLAYSTATION CHANGED GAMING



» The PlayStation's CD-ROM-based media ensured far higher capacity than cartridge-based consoles.



DARREN FALCUS
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
HIPPO ENTERTAINMENT
"The 3D technology and internal structure meant that it was a much easier technology to develop for."



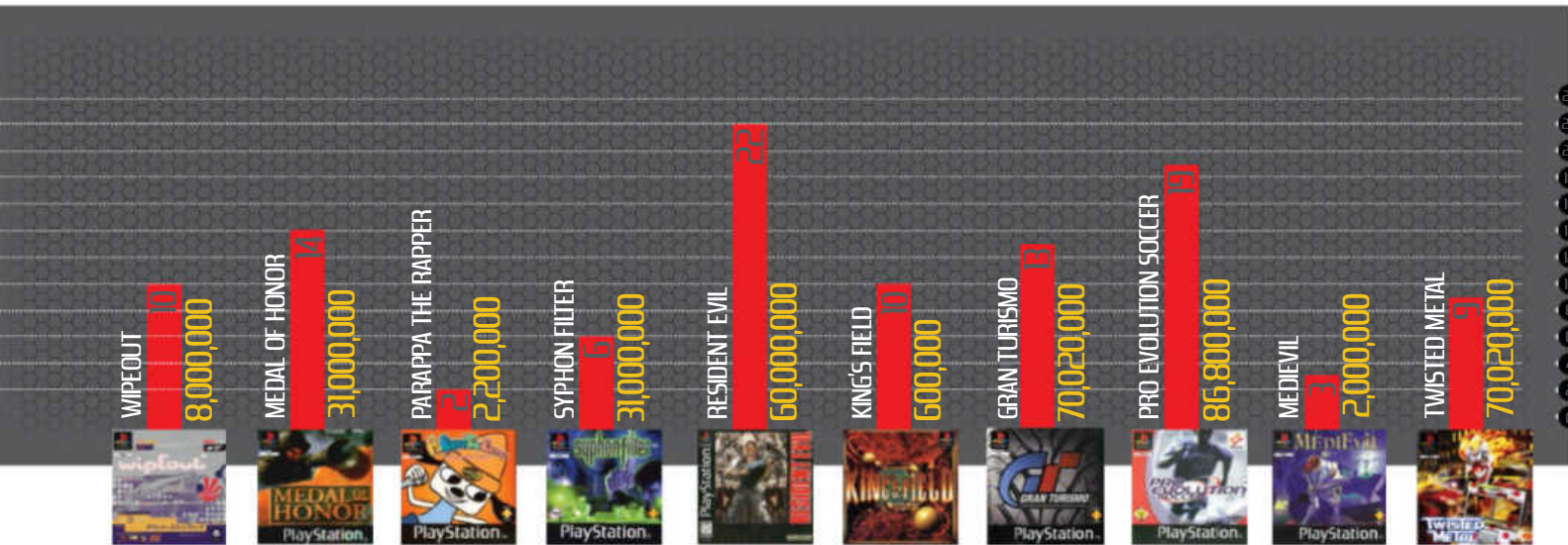
» That's right, even the power button managed to look sexy on Sony's new console.



» Games required a memory card for saving, something that meant an additional cost for gamers.



» PlayStation's additional ports let Sony add various peripherals to the console.





UNDER THE HOOD

The components that made the magic happen

► Sony still, overall, reluctant to become a player in the games industry. Yet Ohga's anger at Nintendo was all that was needed to overrule any doubts.

For Sony's president, it was a case of winning at all costs. He kept the project on track, agreed the purchase of British development house Psygnosis (a startling move, given Japan's previous tendency to invest internally) and, with some refinement and a bit of design prodding, the machine was geared up for launch, first in Japan on 3 December 1994 and then in September 1995 in North America and Europe (selling for £299 in the UK). The console turned heads. "Two words: dinosaur demo," remembers Brian Baglow, writer of the first *Grand Theft Auto*, of the 3D graphic display Sony had slapped on a disc for those who had pre-ordered the console. "As soon as I saw the giant walking T-Rex, I was astonished and awed."

But the dino demo wasn't the only thing that stood out. The PlayStation, which would – thanks to a small redesign and relaunch in 2000 eventually become



DAVID DARLING

KWALEE CEO & FORMER CODEMASTERS BOSS

"It was the first proper 3D games console to gain significant market share and [Sony was] very active in supporting and encouraging developers. It was fun making games with 3D models and polygons rather than the 2D games we'd made for years on machines like the Sega Mega Drive."

known as the PSone – had a shapely, comfortable games controller which did away with the flat design of other machines and replaced letters with shapes. It had external memory cards with 15 save blocks that added up to 128k (an idea copied from the Neo-Geo). It also had a slick appearance. More than all of that, though, it had games. Stunning games. And people wanted to play them.

Eight games were available for the PlayStation on the first day but one truly stood out: Namco's *Ridge Racer*. It was an arcade driving sim with chunky 3D cars, wide tracks, catchy tunes and equally memorable speech; it was a title that laid down an ambitious marker and showed games could have just as much impact as music or film.

It was also a near-perfect version of the hit that had been attracting coins at the arcades and it helped ►



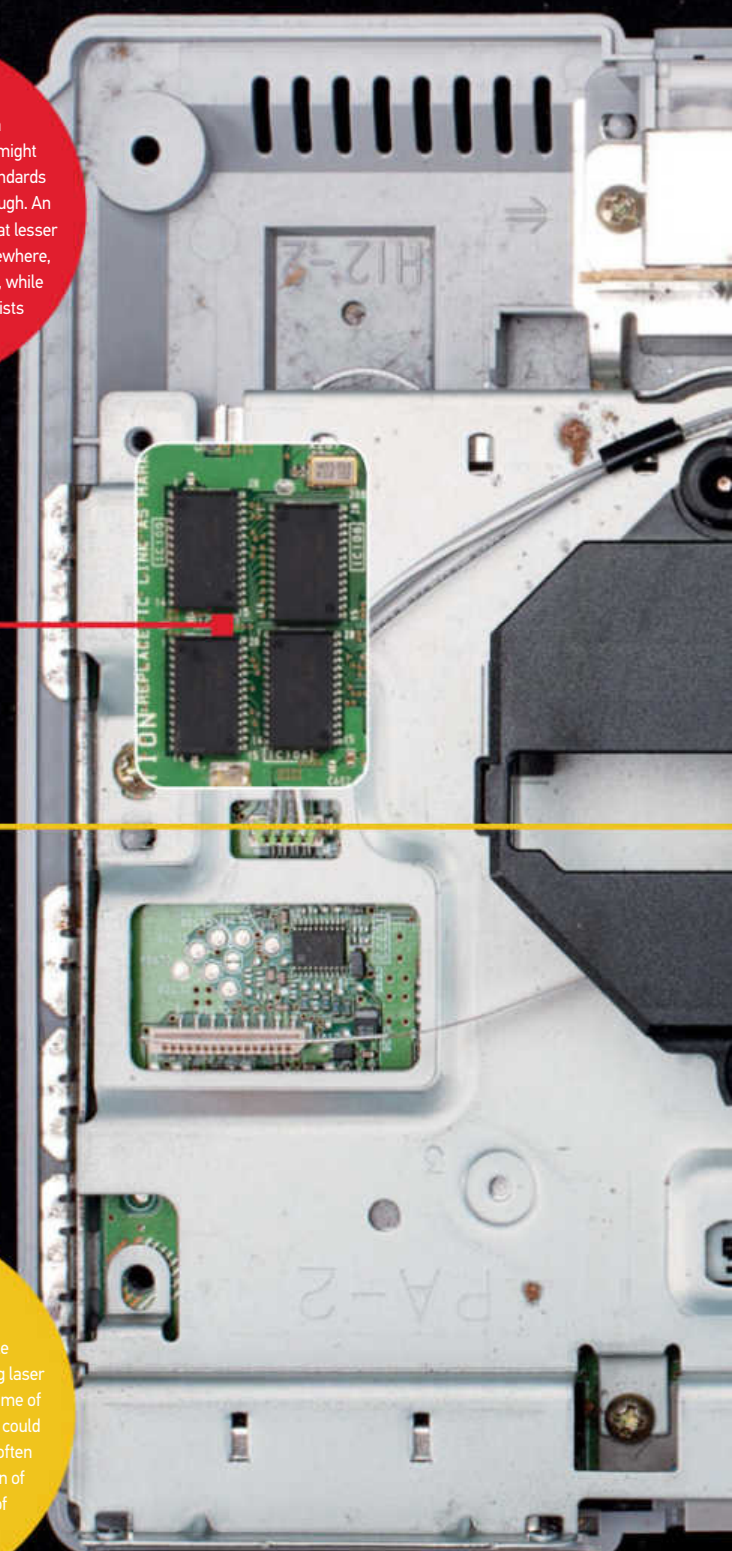
» There was no doubting the significant role that the tomb-raiding Lara Croft played in pushing *Tomb Raider* high in the charts.

RAM

■ The PlayStation packs a whopping 2MB of RAM, which might be next to nothing by today's standards but it proved to be more than enough. An additional 4k data cache meant that lesser commands could be handled elsewhere, freeing up a little more memory, while 1MB of graphics RAM also exists for visuals.

LASER

■ Consoles are never built using top-end tech and the PlayStation was no exception. While certainly fit for purpose, the disc-reading laser used in its CD drive was the cause or some of the most common hardware failures. It could be replaced, but enterprising gamers often instead resorted to the cheaper option of balancing the console at all kinds of precarious angles to make it read discs.



MOTOR

■ That satisfying whirring sound when booting up a new game came from this x2 bad boy, capable of transferring data at 300kb per second. After extended use, the motor could wear out and result in disc read errors, while overuse of the swap trick (to play import games, naturally) could weaken and break the plastic spindle.

CONTROLLER/ MEMORY CARD SLOTS

■ Four front-mounted slots allow for up to two controllers and a pair of memory cards. The controller ports are capable of relaying information and commands from multiple controllers and not just one, as evidenced by the existence of the Multitap. Despite the existence of a second Memory Card slot, some games only allow use of the first.

TRANSFORMER

■ Some consoles use external transformers to keep both size and heat down, but the PlayStation had it all on-board which helps explain its size. Sony was able to shrink the console down for the PSone model in part by moving to an external power transformer on the plug lead rather than having it in the box.

CPU

■ Rocking a 32-bit R3000A processor clocked at just over 33MHz, the PS1 is capable of rendering around 360,000 polygons per second. It serves just as well for 2D games, mind, but few would deny that 3D was what made this console so exciting.



**CHARLIE
CHAPMAN**
NET YAROZE
PROGRAMMER

"There's no doubt that the move from cartridges to a CD format reduced the barriers to entry and led to the release of more games which perhaps wouldn't have made it before."

HOW SONY MADE GAMING COOL

The reasons PlayStation was such an important console



ADVERTS

■ It used to be that advertising agencies would target the same demographic as toy retailers when producing campaigns for games. But by making interesting and original shorts that broke free from that, Sony's marketing proved to generate both conversation and interest in the brand.



CD FORMAT

■ It used to be that taking a few games around to a friend's house would involve lugging around a bag full of chunky cartridges. With the rise of disc-based media, one game case could hold a collection, plus the format also allowed for better audio quality than older hardware could manage.

NIGHTCLUBS

■ Placing consoles running stylish and exciting games like *WipeOut* in bars and nightclubs taught an entire generation one very important lesson – games aren't for kids any more, and there's a lot more to gaming than you might have thought.



GAMES OF SUBSTANCE

■ With so much more storage space, it wasn't just visuals that could be more impressive – worlds and mechanics could be far more intricate than ever before. Only a handful of 16-bit games lasted upwards of 20 hours, but PS1 RPGs would commonly come in closer to 100 hours.

PIRACY

■ What better way to hit the mainstream than to have games available for free? With the web in its infancy, blank discs constantly falling in price and several simple solutions for running unsigned code on PlayStation, piracy was undeniably a huge part of the PlayStation boom.



MATURE GAMES

■ The better graphics got, the more developers were able to use games to tell grown-up stories and faithfully cover topics that simpler visuals perhaps wouldn't do justice. Between visuals, audio and scale, we finally entered an era where games could move and affect players on a similar level to movies. This more emotional connection to games meant that they could be taken a lot more seriously as an entertainment medium.



NET YAROZE

■ The Net Yaroze provided students and hobbyist programmers with a chance to make PlayStation games, opening up the traditionally closed console development scene. A small community of bedroom coders sprang up as a result.



NINTENDO/SEGA

■ A lot of Sony's success came down to a fresh approach to gaming – its competitors had been butting heads for years, leading them to contest the same market. But this just allowed Sony's new audience to appreciate something new even more.



3D GAMING

■ Clever coding allowed 3D (or 3D-style) visuals on some of the oldest hardware, but it was the scale on which the PS1 hardware was capable of rendering 3D worlds and environments that really blew us all away. Early polygon visuals haven't aged well, but it was so impressive at the time.



HOW THE PLAYSTATION CHANGED GAMING

» With the tunes from *Parappa The Rapper* staying with players forever, little wonder it helped kickstart the whole rhythm-based genre.



» With a gorgeous opening that showed the power of the PlayStation and great moves, *Tekken II* was a revelation.



» Although it was an below-average release, *Porsche Challenge* didn't half look good.



► Sony shift 100,000 PlayStations on the first day in Japan. Before long, impatient punters were splashing out £700 or more to import the console into Europe and the US and the momentum began to build. Those 3D capabilities were a major draw and suddenly gaming began to look more mature, moving away from the perception of kids playing in their darkened bedrooms to something trendy adults wanted to share while sitting on their sofa.

"The PlayStation introduced the idea of true 3D gaming to the living room and, beyond that, the mass market," says Cliff Bleszinski, whose first game *The Palace Of Deceit: Dragon's Plight* was released in 1991. "The PlayStation shifted the console from having an almost toy-like quality into the consumer electronics that are just as desired by 12-year-olds as they are by 35-year-olds." Key to this was getting developers on board and helping them through the transition from 2D to 3D. Before the PlayStation, creating 3D on consoles was no easy task but the PC had shown the possibilities with *Doom*, *Wolfenstein* and *Descent*.

The SNES, for instance, had a Mode 7 playfield which allowed for some pseudo-3D with games such as *Mario Kart* and *Pilotwings* but it could only simulate a single flat-textured plane. "There were a handful of games using the SuperFX chip for SNES, which was a coprocessor that accelerated 3D rendering on the SNES, but it wasn't a fully featured GPU as found in the PS1, and it was quite limited," explains Michael Troughton, who worked on the *Destruction Derby* games for the PlayStation while at Reflections.

"The consoles that were appearing weren't making life any easier. Sega Saturn was a powerful machine with 2 SH2 RISC CPUs and a number of dedicated coprocessors to handle audio, video, sprites and polygons but it was notoriously difficult to program for," says Michael. "Programmers had little experience with multi-processing and it hindered them. The PlayStation suddenly opened 3D up to a much wider range of developers, with its custom graphics processor and geometry engine in hardware.

"In fact, I remember thinking it was amazing that the PS1 had the same CPU as the £5,000 Silicon graphics workstation we were using to build the 3D environments. Now almost any programmer with a minimal amount of basic maths knowledge could write a 3D game."



MARTIN HOLLIS
WORKED ON
GOLDENEYE:007

"Sony cultivated the machine's association with music and club culture. Without this it is difficult to imagine *Dance Dance Revolution*, *SingStar*, *Guitar Hero*, or *Rock Band*."

Fuelled by Namco's racer, sped along by *WipEout* and propelled to a higher platform by *Jumping Flash* (which Cliff Bleszinski says remains his favourite game), 3D became

the PlayStation's hallmark and it led to an insatiable demand for three-dimensional titles. Most releases for the console were 3D (the occasional *Oddworld* game aside) and the likes of *Tekken* and *Battle Arena Toshinden* continued to feed the appetite.

This changed videogaming in another way. Given that 3D was more complex, larger development teams were needed. Programmers and artists who struggled to work with 3D found themselves floundering as the new way of presenting games became expected on all platforms, and not just the PS1. "The switch to 3D was a ton of work and it required the relearning of new skills," laments one half of the Pickford Bros development team, Ste Pickford, who designed a kids cartoon game called *DragonTales: Dragon Seek*. "The massive 512 MB CDs we had to fill meant tons more graphics. It was more a feeling of 'Aaargh!' than being blown away."

Sony initially refused to grant concept approval of any 2D game, in its bid to use the beauty of graphics to attract a new breed of gamer. "It meant all game developers had to make 3D games when we were all new to it. I think this sent

games backwards for a while because the PlayStation had power to burn for 2D stuff and there could have been some amazing 2D games as we all had the skills and tools to make them," continues Ste.

But as time went on, developers picked up the skills. "I've definitely experienced the hard work that comes with adapting game development to each new generation of consoles," says Michiteru Okabe who produced the art and graphics for *Armoured Core: Master Of Arena* in 1999 and has, more recently, been the producer on *Resident Evil Revelations 2*. He recalls trying to reuse textures to make a massive stage, running out of memory and redesigning it all at the last minute.

Indeed, Paul Hughes, who was working for EA when the PlayStation was launched, tells of Sony's excellent tools, documentation and all important development kit. Sony also revolutionised the technical requirements checklist and this helped to ensure a solid barrier to entry from a quality perspective.



JAMES RUTHERFORD
NET YAROZE PROGRAMMER WHO LATER
WORKED ON STUNTMAN AND DRIV3R

"Net Yaroze added a whole new dimension to the PlayStation and it was great to be able to create games on something that was current and powerful. Having the games on a magazine cover disc was a major incentive for us."

"I found the initial transition pretty painless," he says. "I'd been writing 3D engines since the late Eighties, so I had a reasonable grasp of rendering pipelines – if anything, it was mind-numbing that it had hardware that would draw textured and lit triangles for me rather than having to obsess about every clock cycle of a software triangle rasteriser. From a visual effects perspective, it had proper, honest-to-goodness alpha blending which really helped up the ante for particle/trail/post effects."

Despite the advancements, however, the mainstream press cast doubt on the companies that were newly emerging to take a slice of the digital pie. In May 1995, the *New York Times* ran with the headline "Video Game War Looms In Hardware" and it spoke of the challenge to be dominant in the \$4 billion videogame market by "introducing better, faster machines with 32-bit microprocessors that can deliver three-dimensional graphics and quicker and more intricate action than the current 16-bit machines."

Sony, the 3DO Company, and Sega were scorned for offering what were now seen to be comparatively expensive machines. "Nintendo of America and the Atari Corporation are producing machines that retain the familiar cartridge format and sell for considerably less," the piece continued, neglecting to focus on what was really important...

It was the CD-ROM drive that was so important for Sony (which, after all, had invented the CD format in 1982 in collaboration with Philips) and it was, as we saw, the entire reason the

company had got involved into the videogame industry in the first place. "Sony was our key partner when we were developing the first CD-ROM games on Genesis," Tom Kalinske, the former CEO of Sega of America tells us, "Back then, none of us knew how to develop on the optical disc media but we all thought it could be great – the future for game machines." It helped to lower the cost of game production, ensuring huge amounts of cash was not tied up in pre-booked cartridge stock that may well not have sold. ►



20 YEARS



STEWART GILRAY
CEO OF JUST ADD WATER

"You'll have to remember that 20 years ago games simply didn't do 3D at home, at least not as well as the arcades did. So when we got our Japanese import PlayStation at launch with *Ridge Racer*, we all sat around with the joypad in our hands, loaded it up, and raced like we were playing the arcade version. *That* blew us away."

» The PlayStation's pad went through numerous revisions in its life, this one introduced analog sticks.

DUALSHOCK AND AWE

The evolution of the PlayStation pad

PLAYSTATION CONTROL PAD

■ The original controller and our first taste of those iconic button symbols. Also notable for popularising the use of four shoulder buttons, where most major pads would only use two.



DUAL ANALOG

■ With players wanting more precise control for 3D gaming, the Dual Analog was a prayer quickly answered. First-person games could finally be played with tight movement.

DUALSHOCK

■ Effectively the same as the previous controller, with motors fitted into each handgrip for vibration. It also brought two additional buttons, namely L3 and R3 mapped to clicking the analog sticks.



DUALSHOCK 2

■ While cosmetically and technically very similar to the original DualShock (to the point where originals would work on PS2 as well), there was one major change: every major button was analog rather than digital.

DUAL ANALOG

■ With players wanting more precise control for 3D gaming, the Dual Analog was a prayer quickly answered. First-person games could finally be played with tight movement, while inventive devs could create quirky uses for a pair of sticks, as seen with launch title *Ape Escape*.

HOW THE PLAYSTATION CHANGED GAMING

► “The move to disc was a huge but natural and necessary change,” says Dave Ranyard, the current London Studio boss of SCE. “Prior to that, we had cartridges and before that dedicated machines, but the ability to store tons more data for our games improved them no end, graphically, musically, and in terms of scope. Disc is a very cheap and efficient method of distributing lots of data.”

The disc also allowed for the streaming of a lot of data. Movies could play back in 16-bit colour thanks to the dedicated MDEC hardware. “Then of course you had CD quality audio that you could stream off the media rather than a MIDI track with less than stellar instruments,” says Paul Hughes. “Everything about it just oozed quality – right from the boot-up sequence.”

PlayStation cemented CD soundtracks as the standard throughout the industry. Until that point most gamers were content with the chip-music that consoles offered, excellent as it was. “But after people started hearing tracks they recognised by the Chemical Brothers and Leftfield in their games, chip-music became unacceptable really fast,” says Colin Anderson, who headed up the audio team at DMA Design from 1993 to 2000 before leaving to create Denki, the world’s first digital toy company.

“It kicked off some sizeable investment in audio development as teams struggled to switch from chip-music to full CD-quality soundtracks,” he continues. “I enjoyed a front row seat on that particular roller-coaster as we were working on the audio design for the game that would eventually become *Grand Theft Auto*. When we started development we fully expected to be using chip-music, but within six months it became clear we needed to up our game if we wanted to compete with all the other great games that were being released. *WipEout* was the straw that finally helped me convince [boss] Dave Jones that DMA needed its own music studio.”

The PlayStation tapped into modern-day culture like no other games console had ever achieved before, positioning itself in style mags and persuading celebrities to grab a joypad in the wake of videogames’ new cool status. (“I was getting carried away playing *Tekken II* and *Tomb Raider* for hours on end,” excused England goalkeeper David James when he conceded three times against Newcastle in 1997.)

But music and the PlayStation, in particular, went hand-in-hand. Developers started to experiment

» Some tried to make out that Crash Bandicoot was the PlayStation mascot but, as it turned out, the machine didn’t need a Mario or Sonic equivalent.

with audio, putting it at the heart of titles such as *Vib-Ribbon* and *PaRappa The Rapper* which led to rhythm-based game crazes such as *Dance Dance Revolution*. They also tapped into the Nineties music vibe of techno and house. The PlayStation ingratiated itself with the growing underground club culture and the sound of big names such as Orbital, Leftfield and The Future Sound Of London.

In Liverpool, where *WipEout* was made, the emerging super-club Cream was positively surreal. Bass pounded, strobes flashed, people danced and then, they stopped, they stared, they gravitated towards the PlayStation pods that had been placed there, just as they had in dozens of other clubs up and down the country, and they played. “We knew something significant about gaming had changed,” continues Nick Burcombe, who now heads up Playrise Digital. “It was pretty amazing really.”

In London, New York, Tokyo and hundreds of cities in between, clubbers were relaxing between DJ sets with a few rounds of *Virtua Fighter* or *WipEout*, which was the first game to incorporate licensed music. “PlayStation was bringing gaming out of the bedroom and into the mainstream in a way no other company had,” says Colin. “That’s what changed gaming forever. It wasn’t the hardware.” Aggressive infiltration of this kind, together with an approach to marketing that was wildly different to much of what had gone before was repositioning gaming as a cool pursuit. “At the time of its launch I was a student and I’d always been into videogames from the early days of arcades,” says Dave. “I

ESSENTIAL EXTRAS

Six of the best Sony peripherals

POCKETSTATION

■ Effectively a portable device akin to the Dreamcast’s VMU, PocketStation never saw the light of day outside of Japan. Over 50 games supported this interesting device, which plugged into the console via the memory card port and had its own LCD screen.



MEMORY CARD

■ While cartridges sometimes allowed game data to be saved to internal memory, the CD format offered no such luxury. Sony’s solution was a proprietary storage solution – a 15-block 1MB memory card to which game data could be saved.



MULTITAP

■ Two controller ports was enough for most games but to fully enjoy something like *Micro Machines V3* (whose predecessor had additional ports built into the cartridge itself) or *Bomberman*, you’d need more. Enter the Multitap.



GUNCON

■ Light gun arcade games were all the rage around the time the PS1 rose to power, and this accessory, originally released to allow *Time Crisis* to be played at home, proved to be one of the most accurate home approximations of the arcade experience.



GAMESHARK

■ Plugging into the console’s parallel port, these cheat devices allowed game code to be modified to activate cheats, alter elements of a game or even to access content that wasn’t in the final build, including additional scenes in *Final Fantasy VII*.



DUALSHOCK 3

■ As costs fell and tech improved, Sony was soon able to reintroduce rumble to the Sixaxis template and the DualShock 3 was born. It quickly superseded its forerunner as the PS3 standard and Sixaxis was discontinued in mid-2008.



DUALSHOCK 4

■ The first full evolution in the life of the DualShock, the PS4 pad adds many new features. Sixaxis motion control remains, with a rear-mounted light bar allowing a camera to better place the handset for accuracy. It also adds a touch pad and Options and Share keys.





» *Wipeout* was one of the UK launch titles for the PlayStation and it took both the gaming and the wider world by storm.



» As the sequel to *Flashback*, the action-adventure *Fade To Black* only made it to the PlayStation (and PC).

► would hang around playing *Space Invaders* and *Galaxians* and until the PS1 came out, that kind of thing made me a geek. But this console changed all that – suddenly videogames were cool – not just acceptable, but actually club culture cool. With a soundtrack from the coolest techno and dance DJs, videogames became a part of sub-culture. And it led to a more mainstream acceptance of consoles in general.”

It helped the console to continue to attract adults, a strategy that Sega had already begun but Sony seemed to perfect. One of the keys to this was Steve Race, boss of Sony Computer Entertainment of America. Race had worked under Kalinske at Sega and he had no problem competing with his former workers (indeed, he infamously took to the stage at the inaugural E3 in Los Angeles just after Sega had announced the Sega Saturn at a price point of \$399, muttering one word – “\$299” – and walking off to great applause).

“Steve knew our strategies of going after an older audience and being edgy and competitive in advertising,” continues Tom Kalinske. “He knew we would do everything we could to come across as the superior ‘cool’ brand, and he did this very well. But I don’t think Sony did anything other than copy lots of aggressive marketing that we had done at Sega initially with Genesis.” And yet, Sony took its marketing to a different level.

Although ads did target children (*Croc* was plastered on bus shelters near schools) titles like *Resident Evil* were certainly aimed at an older audience and developers did all they could to grab their attention. The disgraced former publicist Max Clifford used the tabloid press to whip up a publicity frenzy for controversial

titles. Games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Cool Boarders 2* made the papers by talking of “having to get higher than last time” in ads (Darren Carter, the then senior product manager at SCEE, defended this move, saying, “the wording is genuinely how snowboarders talk”).

One of the most memorable adverts, though, was *Double Life* which had been created by ad agency TBWA. Written by James Sinclair, it became a classic, its lengthy monologue showcasing eccentric individuals describing what they did in their free time. “I won’t deny I’ve engaged in violence, even indulged in it,” says one, to the tune of Fauré’s *Requiem* as he describes – the viewer discovers later – his fantasy PlayStation life. In 2007, the advert, directed by Frank Budgen, was accepted into the Clio Hall of Fame.

Sony’s brief was to the point. It wanted to “break out of a core consumer base of geeky pubescent teenage boys by bringing a broader acceptability and dignity that was absent from the sector.” Sinclair cross-cast the advert, showing policemen breaking the law and vicars committing all sorts of sins (“this got softened somewhat – inevitably,” he tells us). The idea was to put people at the centre of gaming. The advert contained no gameplay footage or screenshots.

“People’s imagination is the most powerful element of the gaming experience, more than the graphics, sound effects, atmosphere and so on. That’s what really puts them in the moment,” James says of the ad that was shot for television and cinema. “I’d thrown in some off-the-beaten-track words and phrases like ‘hoi polloi’ to give the piece a sort of anachronistic vibe. It gave it a timelessness that has served it well over the years.”



STEVE LYCETT SUMO DIGITAL

“To understand the impact, you’ve got to remember that when we first got our hands on the PlayStation hardware it was a revelation on a number of fronts. First, it was the first proper dedicated 3D console – this is in a pre-3DFX/PowerVR accelerated PC graphics era, too. So the results you could achieve quickly and easily were way in front of anything else. Next, having spent so long working with limited cartridge budgets, having a whole CD you could fill and plenty of memory (2MB was a lot back then!) opened the door to bigger levels, better audio, cutscenes and really going to town on the presentation as much as the game. You could say any one of those components existed individually, but it was the PlayStation that pulled it all together in one powerful and complete package.”

And yet, away from the camera, Sony was putting games centre stage, signing exclusive deals for the best games, among them *Tomb Raider*. The second and third titles in the series made the PlayStation their console home and it led to increased sales. “I remember getting our hands on the original *Tomb Raider* when we were working on the original *GTA* and thinking, ‘Oh f***’,” says Brian, on the impact the game had.

But it wasn’t hard to persuade companies to climb aboard. “Behind the scenes, Sony offered developers a better deal than its competitors,” says David Banner who worked on *Tomb Raider* as a tester. “It gave better royalties and it promoted games well. It understood that having the best console relies on having content so the more developers it got on board the more titles it’d have for the customer to digest. Nintendo and Sega primarily relied on their titles being developed in-house, whereas Sony saw the potential of opening up development to third party developers.”

Those third-party developers seized this opportunity, understanding what a console with such a large user base could offer. Programmers and artists looked for new ways to take advantage of 3D and they also sought to tap into current trends such as extreme sports, generating games like *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater* and leading to many a big budget PlayStation event. Over the course of the PlayStation’s lifetime, the age of developers also began to rise, with graduates seeing a stable career path in the industry. “Two of the guys on the *Destruction Derby* team were still in their teens – that would be unheard of today,” says Michael.

That said, Sony also came to embrace smaller, independent developers by releasing a development kit called the Net Yaroze. The problem with previous consoles was the cost of developing for the systems. They were, by and large, closed shops. But with Net Yaroze, a small outlay was enough to bag a kit and start making games, some of which ended up on the cover disc of the *Official PlayStation Magazine* which, thanks to the number of demos it would give away, began to reach a sales figure of over 450,000.

“We used the Net Yaroze to teach console programming at the University of Abertay in Dundee



» *Ridge Racer Revolution* was the chunky car sequel to *Ridge Racer* but the gameplay remained entirely unchanged.

THE 20 MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN PLAYSTATION HISTORY



SONY GOES IT ALONE

1 After talks with Nintendo to develop a disc-based add-on for the SNES, Nintendo shockingly revealed a partnership with Philips, which ultimately came to nothing. Sony's work was not in vain, however – the groundwork for PlayStation had already been done.

ARCADE-PERFECT PORTS

2 Flick through old magazines and you'll find the term 'arcade perfect' applied in so many inaccurate ways. With *Ridge Racer* and the many coin-op ports that followed, though, it really was true a lot of the time.

CD CAPACITY = BIGGER GAMES

3 Cartridges could only allow a certain amount of data to be stored, with no easy way of swapping between them. The compact disc medium changed this, allowing for console games that spanned as many as five discs.



PLATINUM PRICING

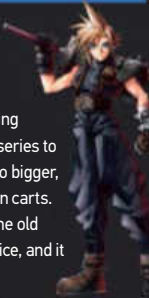
4 With gaming growing more popular, Sony made the smart move of adding its most successful games into the Platinum range, slashing prices to help them shift more copies.

ANYONE CAN MAKE GAMES

5 The Net Yaroze remains one of the coolest hardware iterations ever, a developer console that effectively anyone was able to create games for. The best of these would be showcased via the official mag's demo discs.

FINAL FANTASY JUMPS SHIP

6 The only way for something as epic as Square's RPG series to evolve was to go 3D and to go bigger, a combination not possible on carts. With Nintendo still backing the old format, Square had little choice, and it was a huge coup for Sony.



MARKET AWARENESS

7 Smart advertising made PlayStation the coolest brand in gaming in the space of a few relatively simple campaigns – Sony managed to build the idea of gaming being something more than just a nerdy pastime in mere months.

JUST DANCE

8 Cheap plastic dance mats are nothing compared to the glorious coin-op stages (assuming they work properly) upon which the best perform, but bedroom pop stars didn't care. It just felt good to step on arrows.



SWAP TRICK

9 Who *didn't* know the method of getting import games and even illegal copies running on a PS1? Broken spindles and motors were common, but you could play whatever you wanted.

SMALLER, YET SMARTER

10 A revised PlayStation known as the PSone launched in 2000, with its little form and more cost-effective use of components allowing Sony to sell it for less than the original console. It also did away with many popular piracy methods.

GTA3 INVENTS A GENRE

11 DMA's silly crime sprees were fun, but *GTA* only really shot to notoriety when contained realistic and free open-world sociopathy.



DON'T HATE THE PLAYER, HATE THE GAME BOY

12 Sony's plan for Vita was simple – take on Nintendo's handheld dominance by offering console-quality games on the go. Despite huge *Monster Hunter*-fuelled success in Japan, neither PSP nor Vita really managed to break the western market, but Sony still hasn't given up trying just yet.

DVD READY

13 Choosing DVD as a primary format for games was risky, but it also placed the PS2 among the most affordable DVD players available during the format's boom. Want a DVD player? Might as well get one that plays games too...

PSN HACKED

17 In April 2011, Sony's PSN network was hacked and the details of around 77 million users compromised in the process. The downtime lasted for several weeks and while something of a disaster, it clearly taught Sony some valuable lessons as it hasn't fallen foul to a similarly devastating attack since.

PS PLUS

18 With Microsoft hiding online play behind a paywall, Sony played it smart – keep online play free (at least on PS3) and instead offer free games for recurring subscribers. The model works, and even third-parties are getting involved now.

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO...

19 Sony's confidence in countering every poor decision made by Microsoft was an easy highlight of E3 2013, but the brazen approach to everything – including pricing – easily explains Sony's return to prominence for this new generation of consoles.

LOVING THE INDIES

20 Whatever you think about Sony's triple-A PS4 line-up, its selection of indie and retro titles is superb. From *Resogun* and *Oddworld* to *Grim Fandango* and *Final Fantasy VII* (a PC port, sure, but it's better than nothing, right?), Sony is doing its bit to keep old-school gameplay alive.



\$599

16 The announcement that the PS3 would be worth getting a second job to pay for didn't do all that much to help its early performance – Sony had to do a lot of work to get it even close to the 360 in terms of units sold.



LAUNCH GAMES REVISITED

Sony's PlayStation launch games are now two decades old. We were keen to see how they still fare...

KILEAK: THE BLOOD

“This failed to impress gamers 20 years ago, and it's still a shambles today. The lo-fi visuals and clunky controls are rather charming, but the deathly dull gameplay creates a miserable gaming experience”

DARRAN



NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION

“Visually, this isn't too much of a jump up from the previous generation, but as far as gameplay goes, this still stands up today as a great game to play with friends, even if I am still terrible at it even all these years later...”

JON



STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE

“This is a great game for all the wrong reasons. The animation is laughably poor, while the difficulty level is all over the place. It's nowhere near as dull to play as *Toshinden*, but it remains a disappointingly average brawler”

DARRAN

LAUNCH GAMES*

- A-TRAIN IV EVOLUTION JAPAN
- BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN US/UK
- CRIME CRACKERS JAPAN
- ESPN EXTREME GAMES US
- GOKUJŌ PARODIUS DA! DELUXE PACK JAPAN
- KILEAK: THE BLOOD US/UK
- MAHJONG GOKU SKY JAPAN
- MAHJONG STATION MAZIN JAPAN
- NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION US/UK
- NEKKETSU OYAKO JAPAN
- POWER SERVE 3D US
- THE RAIDEN PROJECT US
- RAPID RELOAD UK
- RAYMAN JAPAN
- RIDGE RACER US/UK
- STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE US/UK
- TAMA JAPAN
- TOTAL ECLIPSE TURBO US
- WIPEOUT UK

*IT'S WORTH NOTING THAT EVEN SONY UK DOESN'T HAVE COMPLETE LISTINGS, BUT RESEARCH SUGGESTS THE ABOVE LIST IS CORRECT

RAPID RELOAD

“It's not quite as good as *Gunstar Heroes*, which it is clearly trying to imitate, but it's still a great blaster that's probably more appreciated now than it was back then”

NICK



CHARLES CECIL

REVOLUTION SOFTWARE BOSS AND CREATOR OF *BROKEN SWORD*

“The PlayStation oozed sex appeal. Sony's inspired marketing quickly made videogames hip. And the team at Sony were amazing – a small team of inspirational, creative people who were re-defining the industry: re-writing the rule book. The two *Broken Sword* games were incredibly well received, being voted amongst the top ten best PlayStation games by *Official PlayStation Magazine* readers. PlayStation launched a new epoch.”



BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN

“I’d probably have been thrilled at the time with this, but while it looks the business it just doesn’t play that well. It’s easy to see how *Tekken* became more popular...” **NICK**



▶ at a time when educational establishments could not get their hands on the full development kit,” says Professor Ian Marshall, whose department at the Uni received a staggering 40 Net Yaroze kits for its computer games technology Masters and Undergraduate students. “It was close enough to the real thing that transferring from Net Yaroze to the full dev kit did not take much re-learning.”

As a result, scores of student programmers were able to write tight code to run on a PlayStation and it opened up a vibrant community of home developers across the world. Just as the Spectrum and BBC Micro created many of the leading UK games developers of the Eighties, so the Net Yaroze contributed to the development of the independent and studio developers we have today. Mitsuru Kamiyama created the RPG *Terra Incognita*. He ended up working on the *Final Fantasy* series which, despite having made its debut on the NES, became one of the PlayStation’s most popular titles.

Final Fantasy was one of a large number of games that made the PlayStation such an iconic hit. While Nintendo continued to concentrate on Mario and Sega on Sonic, Sony had no real mascot despite desperate attempts by some players and media to intrinsically link Crash Bandicoot to it. Instead heralded an eclectic era of massive franchises that ran and ran, from *Resident*

PATRICK BUCKLAND

CEO, STAINLESS GAMES

“I was actually involved with them pre-launch. Sony was determined not to fall into the same trap as the CDi and the 3DO and try to be everything to all men. They were clearly a games console through and through, not a multimedia device. They also took the start that Sega had made with the Mega Drive and made the PlayStation a games console that you didn’t feel embarrassed of.”



RIDGE RACER

“Riiiiidge Raaaaaaacer! Yes there’s only one track, but what a track! It still controls exceptionally well, while the jaunty music and challenging track design will keep you chasing those top times...”

DARRAN



JUMPING FLASH

“This was probably just as odd a game back then as it is now, but I can imagine that for its time it really stood out from anything else. The soundtrack is definitely worth a mention as well...” **JON**

Evil, *Tomb Raider* and *Tekken* to *WipEout*, *Driver* and *Grand Theft Auto*. Racing sim *Gran Turismo* sold more than 10 million copies.

Most astonishing of all, for the PlayStation, was that the hunger for games was high. In May 1998, Chris Deering, then president of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, said five or more games were being sold per PlayStation – “at least 50 per cent better than it ever got on 16-bit”. At that stage the average age for a PlayStation gamer was 22. The PlayStation was keeping the Eighties kids playing while attracting new audiences.

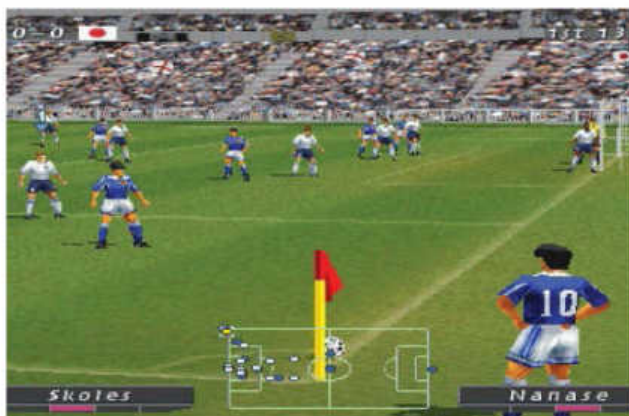
Sony continued to tinker. It advanced on the N64’s Rumble Pak with the DualShock pad in 1998 bringing vibration feedback and it introduced a Platinum budget range for older games that had sold more than 150,000 copies, bringing the cost of console gaming down further. They included *TOCA*, *Die Hard Trilogy*, *Fade To Black*, *Formula 1*, *Time Crisis*, *Micro Machines V3* and *V-Rally*. The PlayStation was also keeping pace: games made at the end of the PS1’s life were far more visually stunning than those at the start.

“Sony jumped into the games business, disrupted it and succeeded in much the same way that Apple jumped into the portable music business and took over,” says Michael Troughton. “The branding was cool, the device was powerful, the technology was good, the business model was better and the timing was right. All of these things made it successful.” ★



25 PLAYSTATION GAMES

The classic library of Sony's world-conquering console is overwhelming – readers provided over 150 nominations for its top 25 games. Join Nick Thorpe to see if your favourites made the cut...



ISS Pro Evolution

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR: 1999 GENRE: SPORTS

25 Konami's *International Superstar Soccer* had long been a fantastic choice for gamers looking for an alternative to EA's *FIFA* series, and this game represents the transition from the *ISS Pro* series to the modern *Pro Evolution Soccer* line. *ISS Pro Evolution* introduced club teams and the Master League mode, bringing it closer to audience tastes while evolving the series' trademark simulation gameplay with additional dribbling tricks and an extremely potent one-two pass.

Gran Turismo 2

DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL

YEAR: 1999 GENRE: RACING

24 It can be hard to follow up the phenomenal success of a game like *Gran Turismo*. Polyphony Digital's approach was to retain the gameplay of the original and massively increase the amount of content available, including over 600 cars and 27 tracks. The game also widened in scope, with the new additions including off-road tracks and rally cars. The scale of the game required it to be split across two discs, with the arcade and simulation modes now contained separately.



Einhänder

DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT

YEAR: 1997 GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

23 Shoot-'em-ups are definitely outside of SquareSoft's RPG comfort zone, but you wouldn't have known it when playing *Einhänder* – the game was pretty conventional, but of a very high quality. The gameplay was enhanced by the combo-based score system and modular Gunpod power-ups, useful for taking down the big bosses. It's the only import game to reach your top 25, and we can only imagine how high it would have climbed if it had received a UK release. We're hoping for a PSN release to correct the injustice.



Time Crisis

DEVELOPER: NAMCO

YEAR: 1997

GENRE: LIGHTGUN SHOOT-'EM-UP

22 The first of Namco's arcade conversions to make our list, *Time Crisis* provided an excellent rendition of the rescue mission that had enthralled arcade gamers in 1995, including all of the incredible set pieces and secrets. It's easy to take the game for granted now, but the action pedal was a revolution in lightgun game design – the ability to take cover allowing the player an additional means of avoiding damage beyond simply firing faster than the enemy – though

the constantly running timer means that you'll rely on your sharpshooting frequently.

But Namco didn't stop there – the game included an exclusive home console mission that featured entirely new stages and boss battles. In the new mission, protagonist Richard Miller is tasked with infiltrating a hotel which happens to be a front for an illegal weapons factory, run by the villainous Kantaris. The new mission changed the dynamics of the game, introducing a grading system which determined the route players took through the game, offering players the chance to visit different locations and fight different bosses on each playthrough. The inclusion of the

extra mission massively extended the lifespan of the game and gave arcade veterans a key reason to pick the game up.

The story of *Time Crisis* on the PlayStation is as much about the hardware as the software. The game was incompatible with previous lightguns, and came bundled with Namco's new lightgun. The G-Con 45 featured extra buttons along the barrel, acting as a substitute for the arcade game's foot pedal, and plugged into the console's video output to enhance accuracy. Other developers adopted Namco's gun as a new standard, as thousands of players picked up the hardware and its bundled killer app.

"A great shooter with music to die for" **gmintyfresh**



"Stupidly addictive once you know what you're doing, and the songs are great too." **TwoHeadedBoy**



Alundra

DEVELOPER: MATRIX SOFTWARE

YEAR: 1997 GENRE: ACTION-RPG

21 The PlayStation is renowned for its excellent selection of Japanese RPGs, but few of them took the action-RPG approach. Of the ones that did, *Alundra* was the best, which comes as no surprise. While Matrix Software isn't the most well-known studio, it was founded by staff from Telenet Japan and Climax Entertainment – the studio that was responsible for *Landstalker* on the Mega Drive. *Alundra*'s plot revolves around the titular elf who has wound up shipwrecked in a strange village. He has the ability to enter the dreams of others, which he needs to employ in order to work out why the inhabitants of the village are having dreadful nightmares. Standing apart from its contemporaries with great 2D artwork and a long, satisfying quest, *Alundra* is a classic that fans of the 2D *Zelda* games will particularly appreciate.



Resident Evil

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM

YEAR: 1996 GENRE: SURVIVAL-HORROR

20 Capcom's survival-horror game made a huge impact on its debut, popularising survival-horror and shifting over 5 million copies. Looked inside a deadly mansion filled with mutated monstrosities, your goal was to take control of special forces agents Jill Valentine or Chris Redfield and get out alive – along with as many of your comrades as you could save. With limited ammunition, there was no hope of laying waste to every zombie you could find – a tension-building approach which was novel in 1996. The fantastic 2002 GameCube remake means that the original *Resident Evil* doesn't have the impact it once did – but just remembering those dogs crashing through the window easily justifies the game's place in this list.

PaRappa The Rapper

DEVELOPER: NANAON-SHA

YEAR: 1996 GENRE: RHYTHM-ACTION

19 The game that popularised rhythm-action as we know it today, *PaRappa The Rapper* is one of the PlayStation's more offbeat hits. The core gameplay in *PaRappa* is simple – each of the game's six stages involves PaRappa rapping with an instructor, whose lines he must repeat by following the button prompts at the top of the screen. While the game received some criticism for its brevity, *PaRappa*'s charms won over gamers. The use of paper-thin cartoon characters in a 3D world is unique, the raps are memorable and PaRappa finds himself in some amusing predicaments, including queuing for the toilet. For that alone, PaRappa is possibly the most relatable character in any videogame ever.





Tomb Raider

DEVELOPER: CORE DESIGN

YEAR RELEASED: 1996 GENRE: ACTION ADVENTURE

18 While *Tomb Raider* is one of the PlayStation's most iconic series, the annual sequels meant that voting was divided between five games and the series had a tough time in this poll as a result. The original is the game which makes your final cut, and a fine choice it is – its mixture of platforming, puzzle-solving and gunplay was groundbreaking in the mid-Nineties, a time when developers were still finding their feet when it came to making 3D games. The first game in the series has a heavier emphasis on puzzle-solving and exploration than its PlayStation sequels, and is packed with memorable moments including an encounter with a Tyrannosaurus Rex. *Tomb Raider*'s success was phenomenal, catapulting Lara Croft to stardom as one of gaming's first female protagonists and launching a series that has seen myriad sequels as well as movies and merchandise.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT

YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: SPORTS

16 *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* was one of the most well-timed games ever – when it launched in 2000, you couldn't walk around town without seeing skateboarding teenagers. The original *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* had been a surprise hit for Activision in 1999, meaning that *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* had a lot to live up to. The basic goal of the game hadn't changed, however improvements could be seen in almost every area of the game. Stages were larger, with twice as many objectives and more secret areas to find. Most importantly, players could now perform manuals on flat ground, allowing for continued combos. Better yet, the game included two new user creation modes, which allows players to design their own custom skaters and stages, massively expanding the lifespan of the game. The soundtrack pleased the aforementioned skating teens and the improved visuals rounded off a top-notch game.

Silent Bomber

DEVELOPER: CYBERCONNECT2

YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: ACTION

17 This futuristic action game takes the classic top-down shooter format and introduces its own twist – instead of shooting your targets, your method of attack is to lay down bombs and detonate them from afar. This is complicated by a whole host of extremely aggressive enemies, ensuring that your protagonist Jutah is constantly in motion. The result is a unique game featuring a high level of difficulty and satisfyingly fast-paced action. It's not uncommon to find yourself fighting multiple enemies while avoiding the fires emerging from recently destroyed targets, which could have proved technically challenging. CyberConnect 2 managed to get the PlayStation to handle this visual overload admirably, and provided an appropriately energetic electronic soundtrack to accompany the carnage.



Grandia

DEVELOPER: GAME ARTS

YEAR: 1999 GENRE: RPG

15 *Grandia* took ages to arrive in the UK but was worth the wait. Ported from the Saturn original, this RPG avoided the genre archetypes of random encounters and turn-based actions. The combination of 2D sprites on 3D backdrops has aged well, too.



WipEout 2097

DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS

YEAR: 1996 GENRE: RACING

14 *Psynosis's* sequel took everything that was great about the original and improved on it, introducing one of gaming's greatest power-ups – the Quake Disruptor. The more forgiving level of difficulty helped the game to reach a wider audience.



Tekken 3

DEVELOPER: NAMCO YEAR: 1998

GENRE: BEAT-'EM-UP

13 A refreshed cast and improved visuals took *Tekken 3* to the top of the 3D fighting scene in the late Nineties. The game also introduced the Eddy Gordo, a favourite of button-mashers worldwide – perhaps explaining why it didn't place higher.



Die Hard Trilogy

DEVELOPER: PROBE ENTERTAINMENT

YEAR: 1996 GENRE: VARIOUS

12 Probe made the best of this movie licence by designing individual games for each of the three films represented. Packed with irreverent humour and buckets of blood, the only thing it's missing is support for the G-Con 45 lightgun.



Gran Turismo

DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL

YEAR: 1997 GENRE: RACING

11 Seeing *Gran Turismo* in action for the first time was mindblowing – console racing games had never looked so realistic. It provided long-term value too, featuring 140 cars and 11 tracks. Little wonder it sold over 10 million copies, becoming the best-selling PlayStation game of all time.





Rage Racer

DEVELOPER: NAMCO

YEAR RELEASED: 1996 GENRE: RACING

10 *Rage Racer* marked the point at which the PlayStation entries of the *Ridge Racer* series were no longer tied to the arcade offerings. The game offered a new take on the series, with the scenery being more muted in colour than in previous releases. However, it was still spectacular scenery – new to the series was the emphasis on courses with

great height variations, leading to memorable sights such as the waterfall on your climb towards the first track's tunnel and plunging downhill straights. The move to console exclusivity brought a main game with more depth, as you competed to earn cash with which to upgrade your vehicle to your liking. You needed the upgrades too, as later stages became very tricky to pass – especially given that you were limited to three retries. It wasn't the best-selling game in the series, but proved to be a key influence on its successors.



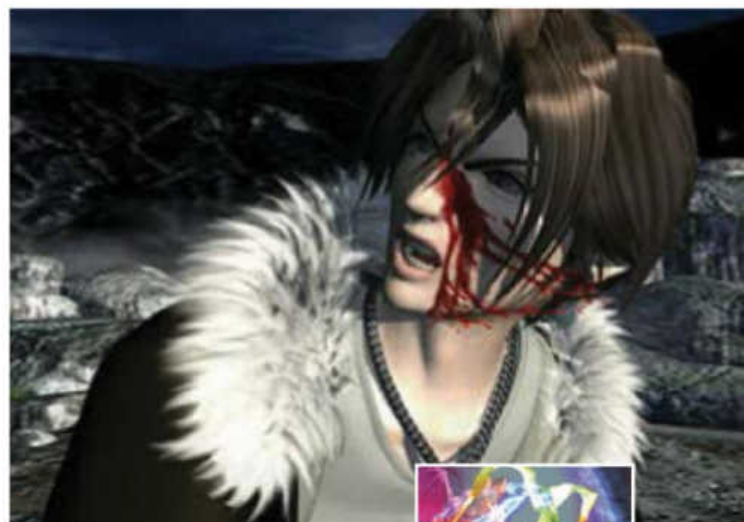
Doom

DEVELOPER: GT INTERACTIVE

YEAR RELEASED: 1995 GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

8 This classic first-person shooter might have appeared on every system under the sun, but that doesn't diminish the impact of the PlayStation release one bit – quite the opposite, in fact. Prior consoles had struggled to handle *Doom*, dropping enemies, windowing the action and even removing the music to get everything to fit. While PlayStation *Doom* didn't contain everything from the PC version, it was easily the most complete and playable console version available. The game includes over 50 stages taken from *Doom* and *Doom II* on the PC, as well as levels exclusive to the PlayStation, and the addition of a new ambient soundtrack further intensifies the fear factor that *Doom* is famous for. Best of all, it includes support for Sony's oft-forgotten link cable, allowing two players to have a deathmatch or team up to battle the monstrous hordes. First-person shooters evolved rapidly over the life of the PlayStation, but the quality of *Doom*'s conversion secures its spot.

TOP 25 PLAYSTATION GAMES



Final Fantasy VIII

DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT

YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: RPG

9 For gamers whose *Final Fantasy* experience began and ended with *VII*, *Final Fantasy VIII* came as a shock – but even those who had followed the series from its days on Nintendo consoles were in for some surprises. While the complete refresh of cast and plot was a series tradition, Squaresoft's decision to overhaul the visual style of the series wasn't expected by many gamers. The gameplay was also overhauled. Magic was now drawn from enemies, and summoned creatures played a far more crucial role in the game. The new Junction system allowed players to tie magic to stats for boosts – a deep but initially overwhelming addition. The changes weren't to everyone's tastes, explaining its lower position relative to its predecessor, but *Final Fantasy VIII* maintained the high quality associated with the series and ranks as one of the PlayStation's most visually stunning games.

Tekken 2

DEVELOPER: NAMCO

YEAR RELEASED: 1996 GENRE: BEAT-'EM-UP

7 The original *Tekken* became the best 3D fighting game on the PlayStation almost by default – it was clearly better than the likes of *Battle Arena Toshinden*, but was still in need of refinement. *Tekken 2* provided the tune-up that saw the series become a serious contender in the 3D fighting world. Staple moves such as reversals and back throws were introduced here, as well as competitive modes like Team Battle and Survival which cemented the game as a multiplayer favourite. *Tekken 2* introduced a range of new characters, from series stalwarts such as Jackie Chan homage Lei Wulong to comedy characters such as the boxing kangaroo Roger. Additionally, unlocking the sub-bosses was now a much more rewarding endeavour, as the returning characters were fleshed out to match the standards of the new sub-bosses, greatly expanding the cast's variety and giving the game increased long-term appeal.



"As much as I loved the first one, this just fleshed out the shell of a game it was"
Droo



Ridge Racer Type 4

DEVELOPER: NAMCO

YEAR RELEASED: 1998 GENRE: RACING

6 Towards the end of the Nineties, it was clear that trends in the gaming market were changing. The colourful visuals and hyperactive soundtrack that had served *Ridge Racer* so well at the PlayStation's launch were out of fashion, and players increasingly demanded longer games with more content. Luckily for Namco, somebody had a finger on the pulse of gaming because *Ridge Racer Type 4* shifted effortlessly to match contemporary tastes. The game adopted pastel-coloured skies and a more relaxed soundtrack, while the racing – as excellently drift-y as ever – took place across more tracks and cars than ever before in the new Grand Prix season mode.



Metal Gear Solid

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR RELEASED: 1998 GENRE: STEALTH ACTION

3 The technology of the 32-bit era gave ambitious developers the tools they needed to provide cinematic presentation – and none were more ambitious in that regard than Hideo Kojima. *Metal Gear Solid*'s high quality cut-scenes provided a lesson in bringing the big screen experience to consoles. But *Metal Gear Solid* wasn't just great to watch, as it featured tightly designed gameplay that inspired a number of stealth imitators. However, none of them could match its creativity, as the game's ingenious design leveraged everything from the contents of your memory card to its own packaging.



It's been a long time since I had such a good fight...

"This was pretty much the reason I even BOUGHT a Playstation" gunbladelad

Final Fantasy VII

DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT

YEAR RELEASED: 1997 GENRE: RPG

2 Before 1997, publishers were under the impression that Japanese RPGs just weren't where the big money was to be made. Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy VII* changed that perception forever, selling over 9 million copies and causing a boom in RPG localisation. The game introduced a generation of gamers to the genre and spawned a variety of sequels, as well as a movie. *Final Fantasy VII* was an epic on an unprecedented scale. The game's use of pre-rendered backgrounds allowed the game a visual impact unique within its genre, combining with Nobuo Uematsu's incredible soundtrack to aid the story in emotionally affecting players. And boy, what a story – with a memorable cast of heroes, as well as an iconic villain involved in one of gaming's most notoriously shocking moments, it lingers in the memory long after completion.

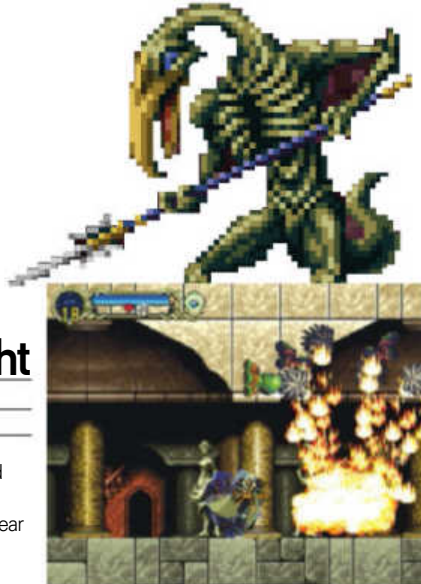


Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR RELEASED: 1997 GENRE: PLATFORMER

5 Konami's platformer was overlooked on release but has gained a thoroughly deserved reputation for excellence over the years. *Symphony Of The Night* moved away from the linear template of previous *Castlevania* games, opting instead for a single, massive map that opened up as new abilities were gained in a manner similar to Nintendo's *Metroid* games. The game provided huge scope for exploration, especially given that when you think it's all over, Dracula's castle inverts and provides you with even more to do. It's an expensive PlayStation game, but fan demand has seen it ported elsewhere since.



Tenchu: Stealth Assassins

DEVELOPER: ACQUIRE

YEAR RELEASED: 1998 GENRE: STEALTH ACTION

4 Ninjas had been the subject of countless games before *Tenchu*, but they were primarily action games. *Tenchu* explored a more authentic ninja experience, by requiring the player to exercise caution and stealthily assassinate targets.

The game offered a great deal of freedom in terms of carrying out your objectives, but was not for the impatient – observation was key as you tried to identify the perfect time to strike. We have to admit to being surprised by just how high *Tenchu* placed, but it's well worth revisiting – dropping from the roof and slicing up an unsuspecting guard is a thrilling experience.





"Any game that rewards an insane amount of practice and time spent with the chance to play as a block of processed soya curd must be the best of its generation"

earlymodernsteve

retro
GAMER
READERS'
CHOICE

Resident Evil 2

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM ■ YEAR RELEASED: 1998 ■ GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

1 With the success of *Resident Evil*, a sequel was inevitable. After briefly planning a spin-off set in the ruins of the first game's mansion, Capcom put plans into place for a new game set in and around Raccoon City's police department, starring rookie cop Leon S. Kennedy and student Elza Walker. If the latter name seems unfamiliar, your memory isn't failing you. *Resident Evil 2* had a lot to live up to – and Capcom knew it. A year into development, the new game wasn't living up to the team's expectations. Rather than trying to fix the game's problems, Capcom took the bold decision to scrap the game and start again. The number one spot achieved here just goes to show how well that risk paid off.

Now starring Leon and Claire Redfield, the sister of Chris from the original game, the *Resident Evil 2* that made it to market retained the basic setting of the scrapped sequel but little else. While the basic idea of the game remained much the same as the original – escape with your life, as well as any survivors you find – the new setting made for big changes. Where the original game turned up the heat slowly by introducing a single zombie after a few scenes of build-up, *Resident Evil 2* drops you straight into the fire, placing you on the already infested streets of Raccoon City.

Resident Evil 2 employs many of the same mechanics as the original game – the same controls, the limited saves and those item storage chests all make a return. However, it improves on the original in a variety of ways. Characters now respond to damage visually, clutching wounds and even limping as their health drops, and a variety of mini-games are provided for players who have finished the game, including the brilliantly ridiculous Tofu Survivor mission.

But the biggest improvement was the 'zapping' system, which allowed the two characters to experience each other's scenarios. Actions taken with one character will affect the other character's experience – defeating an enemy during your first run may well remove it for the second, while using up items during the first run can make it harder to get through the second. This feature gave the game massively improved replay value over its predecessor.

Resident Evil 2 was a narrow winner in the voting, but it's a worthy one which represents Capcom at its absolute best. The game's mechanical improvements were subtle enough to keep things immediately familiar to fans of the original game, but the new setting allowed the game its own distinct identity. Refusing to compromise on quality caused short-term strife, but the resulting game has stood the test of time.

Five Reasons Why It's Great

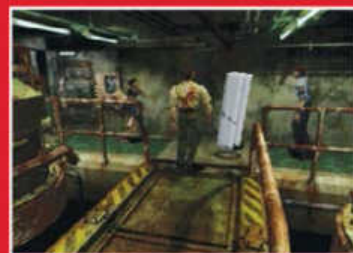
1 It brilliantly handled the diminished shock value of zombies by introducing iconic enemies like the Licker.

2 The plot doesn't spiral into the complex nonsense of later games in the series.

3 It introduced Leon, who also starred in the excellent *Resident Evil 4* as well as the best bit of *Resi 6*.

4 Raccoon City is the perfect setting for *Resident Evil*, which is why it's so frequently revisited.

5 How many other games let you run around as a giant block of tofu?







FINAL FANTASY VII

IN THE MID-NINETIES, SQUARE'S FLAGSHIP FRANCHISE ABANDONED NINTENDO'S HARDWARE AND EMBRACED THE PLAYSTATION, A MOVE THAT WOULD LEAD TO FINAL FANTASY VII, AN AMBITIOUS, REFINED AND ENORMOUSLY INFLUENTIAL RPG. DIRECTOR YOSHINORI KITASE AND ART DIRECTOR YUSUKE NAORA DISCUSS THE CREATION OF THIS MASTERPIECE WITH US IN UNPRECEDENTED DEPTH.

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S JAWS FITS INTO IT SOMEWHERE, AS RETRO GAMER DISCOVERS...

Without hyperbole, *Final Fantasy VII* is the RPG that changed the genre. Opening the Western floodgates to Japan's own style of role-playing and popularising the entire sub-genre, the 10-million-plus-selling game was, for many players, their introduction to the potential of interactive storytelling and the first videogame narrative to leave a mark on them. It's also divisive, anecdotally referred to as the most returned game of all time and often criticised by Western RPG veterans – yet such cynicism can't mask the impact it had upon release in 1997. Along with *Gran Turismo*, *Final Fantasy VII* shifted millions of PlayStation consoles by demonstrating the machine's capabilities, captivating gamers with a fictional universe of unrestrained scope and style that would govern an entire corner of the industry. Back when the game was being created, Square (today known as Square Enix) was a company in transition, and the influx of talent that brought *FFVII* into being, as well as a development culture that fostered creativity, was ultimately responsible for this deservedly celebrated RPG.

At the 1995 SIGGRAPH computer graphics convention in Los Angeles, the company formerly known as Square presented an interactive demo to the world that showcased its *Final Fantasy* property in unprecedented fashion. This project



depicted three characters from *Final Fantasy VII* fighting a Golem enemy in full 3D, a jaw-dropping contrast to the SNES-based 2D roots of the game, complete with visual effects and cinematic in-battle camera angles that implied a future beyond the static staging of the series' stories up until that point. When you look at the tech demo now, you can absolutely see the founding technical conceit of *Final Fantasy VII* embedded within it. Squaresoft saw that *Final Fantasy* could be so much more on a platform that allowed the company to experiment with such high-end technical ideas.

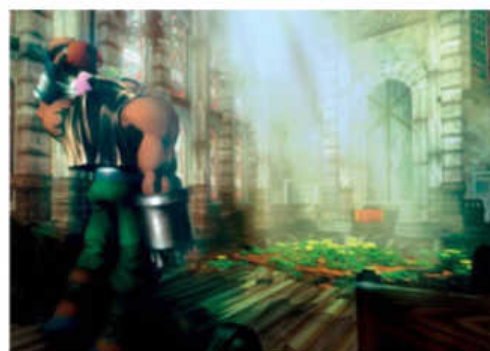
The SIGGRAPH project would form the 'seed', as producer and creator Hironobu Sakaguchi dubbed it on a promotional video for the game, of *Final Fantasy*'s move into the next console generation. To any seasoned gamer, the most well-known part of the development of *Final Fantasy VII* is the defection that started it all. Long considered a Nintendo stalwart since the original *Final Fantasy*'s release on the NES in 1987, Square shifted to the PlayStation for its CD-ROM capabilities over the N64's comparatively limited cartridges. This fit the grand ambitions of this new sequel.

"We were fans of Nintendo's hardware, although in order to use CG movies in the game like we intended, we needed a lot of storage space, and for that reason decided on a platform

that used the higher-capacity CD media," director Yoshinori Kitase tells us.

How ironic that this franchise would soar on a Sony platform, given that Nintendo publicly broke away from a CD-enabled SNES collaboration with the electronics giant earlier in the decade. The emerging disc format enabled *Final Fantasy VII* to be far more cinematic than its forebears – an important factor, especially to Sakaguchi. Yet an interesting factor in all this was the set of technical influences on the team, many of whom were from Western game development, as Kitase explains to us: "We looked at trends in the foreign-made PC games of the time, such as *Alone In The Dark* and *Heart Of Darkness* [and so on], and made it our objective to combine together smooth action sequences using polygon-based characters and clever camera work with the insertion of effective CG movies at a high level. I believe that we pretty much achieved our goals in this regard."

When it came to setting and story, *Final Fantasy VII* would similarly be a departure from series convention. While the previous entry in the series had a pronounced steampunk theme, the set of environments in the seventh game would vary massively from continent to continent, from a vast, polluted metropolis to backwater towns; that clash of



DISTRACTIONS

The best of *Final Fantasy VII*'s many extra tasks and mini-games

CHOCOBOS

Catching them, riding them, racing them and breeding them – the Chocobo element of *FFVII* is a game in itself, and becomes bewilderingly complex when you're looking to breed that lucrative Gold Chocobo, which can reach parts of the map that even the Highwind cannot.



BATTLE ON FORT CONDOR

Visiting Fort Condor triggers this intriguing little strategy offshoot, where you fund small skirmishes to hold back Shinra forces from the giant bird perched atop the fort. It's no *Age Of Empires*, but it shows how diverse the ideas are in *FFVII*.



SNOWBOARDING

On the second disc, Cloud gets the opportunity to snowboard down a mountain. Later in the game, it re-emerges as a tricky arcade game at Gold Saucer's Wonder Square. This mini-game was popular enough to justify a mobile spin-off, which is naturally only available in Japan.



MOTORCYCLE CHASE

One of the nicest surprises early on is an action-based mini-game where you have to protect your comrades from Shinra soldiers on bikes by ramming them off the road with Cloud's inexplicably large Buster Sword. It's great fun.



FIRST-PERSON SHOOTING

Visiting the 'Speed' part of Gold Saucer triggers this bizarre but quite impressive first-person shooter section, where hitting a high score lands you a prize. This is notable for its kaleidoscopic visuals, in stark contrast to much of the game.



BATTLE ARENA

The only way to get Cloud's Omnislash Limit Break outside of the finale, and a clever means of extending the combat's appeal, the battle arena on Gold Saucer is a relentless challenge where you have to survive successive rounds of enemies and status ailments.



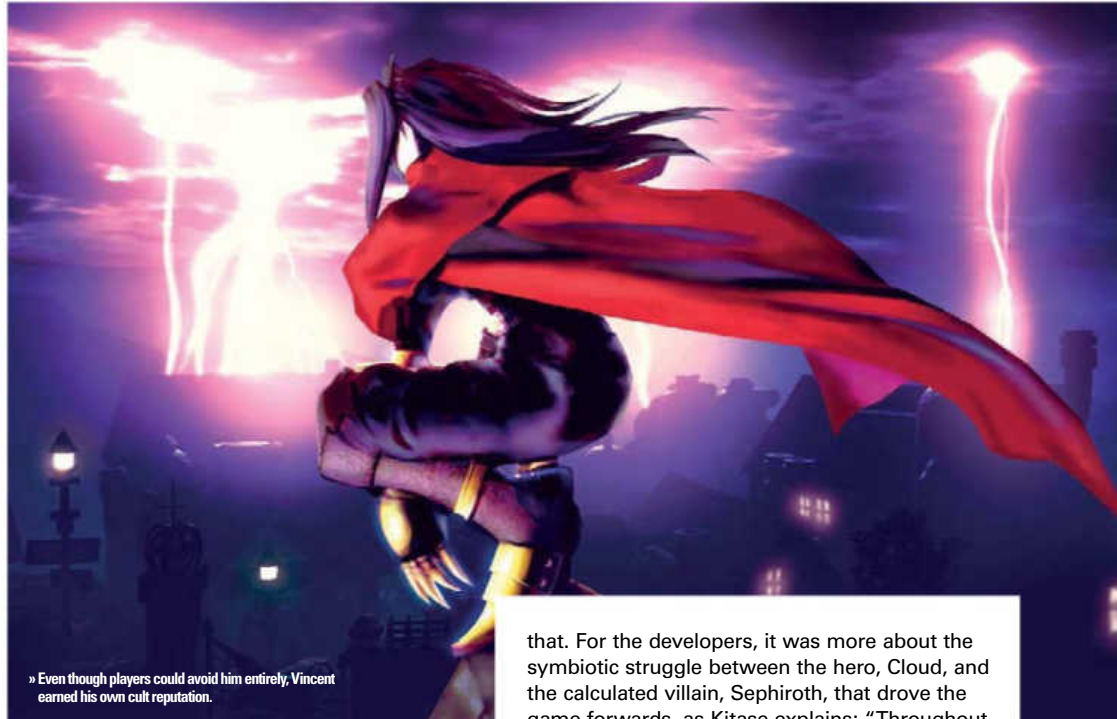
FINAL FANTASY VII'S UNSUNG HERO

Kitase weighs in on the oddly high popularity of Zack Fair, Cloud's former mentor

As you may recall, the entire flashback sequence where Cloud remembers the events in Nibelheim that led to Sephiroth's transformation into a twisted enemy turns out to be a bit different. Later, we learn that Cloud confused himself with Zack, his superior in the army. Ever since then, Zack has remained a popular figure among *Final Fantasy* fans, which led to the spin-off *Crisis Core*. His role in Cloud's story makes him a unique element in *FFVII*'s tangled web.

"Zack is the vessel onto which Cloud twistedly projects his complexes towards SOLDIER [Shinra's elite fighting force]," Kitase tells us. "He was created by the scenario writer, [Kazushige Nojima], as he was trying to build up the mystery surrounding Cloud's past, and we did not originally think of Zack as a major character, but he seemed to be strangely popular with the fans. Much later on, Zack featured heavily in *Crisis Core*, and Mr Nojima was in charge of the scenario for both titles. When he first created Zack, I doubt that he could possibly have thought that we would be delving into the same character's story ten years on!"

» *Final Fantasy VII*'s Materia system is so deep that it can eventually transform the entire rhythm of a battle, by letting you alter the conditions of it.



» Even though players could avoid him entirely, Vincent earned his own cult reputation.

futuristic technology against these remnants of a beautiful old world.

We asked Kitase to discuss the inspirations for the planet's creation, and he graciously passed our questions on to *FFVII*'s art director, Yusuke Naora. "Initially we wanted to try something new by having a corporation as the major enemy while still keeping the game broadly in the fantasy genre," he explains, referring to the Shinra Electric Power Company. "Having decided on this concept, we actively included many steampunk-like elements to try to merge the appeal of traditional high-fantasy 'brick-built' structures and sci-fi elements at a high level. However, as there was to be magic present in this world, it would have been hard to have cyberpunk-esque unknown future technology sitting comfortably with the other influences, so we tried to keep that aspect down as much as possible."

Naora continues: "On the design side, we were also very much inspired to mix in things from many different periods in a semi-chaotic manner, including things from our everyday lives such as the newer buildings in Tokyo, the streets of Ginza, and the Shibuya station building." All this led to a laudably diverse set of environments, which still felt like a cohesive part of the same world.

The setting was closely connected to the narrative – the backdrop of *Final Fantasy VII*'s story is that the planet is suffering, being mined of resources by the ruthless Shinra, which is also a prominent military force. Yet the central conflict of the story is actually smaller-scale than

that. For the developers, it was more about the symbiotic struggle between the hero, Cloud, and the calculated villain, Sephiroth, that drove the game forwards, as Kitase explains: "Throughout the story I really wanted to depict Sephiroth as an overwhelmingly powerful threat. However, if you have a villain as an actual opponent who appears before the heroes then however strong or charismatic you make the character, he will still feel very much 'life-sized' and limited in scope, reduced to another minor evil."

What source of inspiration helped the team tackle this issue? You'd be surprised. Kitase continues: "To solve this problem, I decided to present Sephiroth indirectly, making the player aware of his existence through hints and stories but not having him show himself before them much. The player sees the aftermath of his ruthless deeds but does not arrive at the source of the evil for a long time. This was the same method used by Steven Spielberg in the film *Jaws*. Finding the butchered President Shinra on the top floor of the Shinra building and the impaled body of the Midgar Zolom are moments symbolic of this approach."

Players don't properly encounter Sephiroth until they're around ten hours in, and even then it's in fleeting glimpses – we see him prominently in flashbacks, leading to the discovery about his sad origins and subsequent breakdown. He, along with the attached musical theme, *One-Winged Angel*, would become iconic aspects of *FFVII* upon release. Cloud, the amnesiac hero trying to piece his distressing memories back together, was an equal point of fascination for players. It's this dynamic, with their subsequently explored

“WE MADE IT OUR OBJECTIVE TO COMBINE SMOOTH ACTION SEQUENCES WITH CG MOVIES AT A HIGH LEVEL”



THE GREATEST MOMENTS OF FINAL FANTASY VII

Not featuring Cloud in a dress

THAT DEATH...

You knew it would be this – shocking, sad and brilliant on the part of the Squaresoft team, a certain character is murdered by Sephiroth at the climax of the game's first act. It's notable because it is so brutal, but this brave move to take the character out of the story meant *Final Fantasy VII* would be forever remembered by players.

OMNISLASH

The entire game builds to this final conflict between Cloud and Sephiroth, where the hero slices down the grey-haired villain in spectacular fashion, using his final Limit Break, Omnislash. All right, so it isn't necessarily the first time you use Omnislash, but it's still a thrilling component of the game's conclusion.

THE WEAPONS EMERGE OUT OF THE CRATER

Sephiroth unleashes Weapons on the planet, giant boss-style creatures that, when put together, look like something out of a Japanese monster movie. The idea of the optional super-boss is a *Final Fantasy* staple – here, they're made a key turning point in the story, in another example of Square's pioneering FMVs.

500 YEARS LATER...

After the credits, we're treated to this brilliant but somehow chilling scene, 500 years into the future. We see Nanaki and his children

running through a canyon, before emerging onto a vista that shows an abandoned Midgar, overgrown and free of the technology that drained the life of the planet.

THE PRESIDENT IS DEAD

When Kitase alludes to *Jaws*, he's referring to this scene where the player reaches the top of Shinra Headquarters and finds the President dead, impaled by Sephiroth's katana. It's a brilliant way to bring the villain into the story, having him lurk just out of reach.

SUMMONING KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND

Knights of the Round was easily the most lavish summon spell in the entire series up until that point. The animation for the attack, *Ultimate End*, sees 13 knights battering the enemy with a slew of extraordinarily powerful moves; a just reward for the exhausting process of breeding a Gold Chocobo to get it.

SEPHIROTH WALKS INTO THE FLAMES

The highlight of the entire Nibelheim flashback, told from the village of Kalm early on in the story, is an eye-opening cinematic where Sephiroth turns away from Cloud into the flames, after the twisted warrior burns the town to the ground. Perhaps the most visually recognisable part of the game.

ZACK AND CLOUD ESCAPE NIBELHEIM

In this flashback, the events of the Nibelheim incident are fully disclosed. We learn that Cloud borrowed Zack's identity, and that this member of SOLDIER was gunned down by Shinra outside Midgar. This sequence is made all the more sad when you've earlier encountered Zack's parents in the town of Gongaga, where both his mother and father are completely unaware of his tragic fate.

EMERALD WEAPON SWIMS OUT OF THE DARKNESS

Late into the third disc, heading into the ocean with the submarine gives the player a few surprises, including the final whereabouts of the Turks, Shinra's agents whose paths cross yours throughout. That's before you see bubbles emerge out of the black, though – when the fearsome Emerald Weapon drifts towards you in terrifying fashion. Brr! It's an absolute bitch to kill, too.

GETTING THE HIGHWIND

Final Fantasy as a series is ingenious in the way it lets you manoeuvre around the world. When you get the Highwind, you can go almost anywhere in the entire world, a gloriously freeing reminder of the diversity of locations within the game.

history of bloodshed and trauma, that players hadn't seen before in *Final Fantasy*. "Furthermore, however far the player pursues him, Sephiroth is always just out of reach, and because of this our image of him becomes more and more idolised and idealised," explains Kitase. "This story structure also overlaps with the reasons that Cloud has such a complex about his own past, and I believe it is an effective tool for showing the relationship between the two characters."

All the character designs and their personalities were left in the hands of the designers, a break from previous games, where Sakaguchi would oversee their conception. This was also the first project

where Tetsuya Nomura would be the sole character designer, who, having contributed work to *Final Fantasy V* and *VI*, replaced Yoshitaka Amano from the previous titles. A *Famitsu* interview with Nomura (translated by Andriasang) explains that Cloud was essentially his creation, yet Kitase told us that determining both the looks and personalities of every one of *Final Fantasy VII*'s iconic cast of characters was "largely the responsibility of [Nomura]". It marked a sea change for the series. Gone were the primarily medieval, dreamy heroes of Amano, and in came a fresh, exciting array of heroes that would have an extensive impact on Japanese popular culture – not to mention birth a string of ideas that would be appropriated into character clichés, like spiky hair and giant swords. Amano would still contribute character sketches and the iconic meteor logo, however.

The immense back story for these heroes and villains was fine-tuned by scenario writer Kazushige Nojima, while many of the actual narrative ideas came from a unique exercise that once again showed Squaresoft's experimental approach. "When designing the game, we asked all staff on the *Final Fantasy* team to submit possible episode ideas for character back stories and created the overall stories by putting these together," says Kitase. "It was the scenario writer, Mr Nojima, who managed to put together a complete and detailed story from this massive pool of ideas, a process that was much like putting together a jigsaw puzzle."

This exercise led to an intriguing collection of stories across the cast of heroes, with one main plot driving it all: the planet's impending destruction at the hands of Sephiroth, where he would harness the world's natural defences – known as the Lifestream – for himself. The cast of *Final Fantasy VII*, including the tortured, unfocused Barret; last of an ancient race Aeris (or Aerith – a misspelling in the game's translation, as you probably know); and down-and-out pilot Cid Highwind; as well as more esoteric faces like the tomb-dwelling, optional companion Vincent Valentine, struck a chord with gamers, as their stories dovetailed skilfully with the main narrative.

These small tales, even Sephiroth's, traced back to the all-encompassing Shinra plot device – this corporation that is draining the planet of its resources. Given that *Final Fantasy VII* was made in the mid-Nineties, you could draw obvious

parallels with the real-world environmental issues at that time. Yet environmentalism, surprisingly, was not part of the team's storytelling agenda, Kitase explains: "We did not particularly plan on bringing out environmental destruction as a major theme of the game but rather intended the story to depict the internal struggles of Cloud and Sephiroth.

"However, if pushed I would say that this theme was not so much that of concern over destruction of the environment but more about how we wanted to show how civilisation and the environment coexist. Cloud and his companions first appear in the game as a group trying to take down the Mako reactors, but in the end we see them getting help from the Lifestream that is the source of that energy, and going forward into a future of coexistence with the planet. I believe that this theme of how we can strike a balance and live in harmony with the environment is one that is shared by all of us."

The Lifestream is the literal embodiment of the planet's energy, where all life emerges from and where it returns to with death. Its genesis came from Sakaguchi, who had come up with the idea as a reaction to tragic



» [Top left] Catching and breeding Chocobos is one of the true tests of *Final Fantasy VII*.



» [Bottom right] *FFVII* is a high point for the series' stunning creatures, with Bahamut being a decent means of lazily dispatching enemies.



“SEPHIROTH IS ALWAYS JUST OUT OF REACH, AND SO OUR IMAGE OF HIM BECOMES MORE AND MORE IDOLISED”

events in his own life. "When we were creating *Final Fantasy III*, my mother passed away," he said in a video to coincide with *FFVII*'s release. "And ever since, I have been thinking about the theme of life. Life exists in many things, and I was curious about what would happen if

I attempted to examine life in a mathematical and logical way; maybe this was my approach in overcoming the grief I was experiencing."

With that delicate balance in mind, an antagonistic force like Shinra seemed suitable – it also presented a fine opportunity to go against the curve of the last six games. "We had a feeling that ideas for villains in RPGs had kind of become stale and repetitive, with it always being something like a massive dragon or an evil ruler who had acquired an ancient power," says Kitase. "When we asked ourselves what a more modern take on a powerful evil would be, we came up with the idea of a corporation that pollutes the environment for excessive profit."

The most talked-about moment in this complex tale, though, would be the death of a major character. One of the conditions of running our exclusive interview from Square Enix was that we wouldn't reveal this character's name – but you know which one we're talking about. Everyone knows it. You might

RANDY PITCHFORD
CEO, Gearbox
Software



“Obviously, role-playing games were a huge influence on *Borderlands*. *Final Fantasy* offered many of the standards and tropes that are borrowed by many role-playing games of today. The engagement and motivation that comes from levelling up and the draw of collecting loot first became clear to all of us when we did such things with pencil-and-paper games. While many PC games applied these principles, *Final Fantasy* managed to capture the design in a most accessible way at a time when our controllers had only a D-pad and two buttons. The elegance of the *Final Fantasy* approach to role-playing has inspired a generation.

In fact, the very first videogame that my wife and I played together from beginning to end was the first *Final Fantasy* game on the NES. To this day, we have fond memories of that experience and an irrational loyalty to the franchise. I know that many people see *Final Fantasy VII* as the high-water mark for the series, but for me it was the earlier *Final Fantasy* games on the NES and Super Nintendo that have had the most impact.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...

SEQUELS IN FINAL FANTASY



FINAL FANTASY X-2

Solid and technically superb but tonally misfiring, *Final Fantasy X-2* took *FFX*'s timid protagonist, Yuna, then popped on some hot pants and gave her a couple of guns. The game's 'Perfect' ending is almost worth playing through it alone for fans of the first game, though.



FINAL FANTASY IV: THE AFTER YEARS

Originally released on mobiles in Japan, then through WiiWare and again on the PSP with *Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection*, *The After Years* is a direct sequel that is built with the look of the original SNES title. The PSP version presents it in the most coherent, beautiful form.



DISSIDIA 012 [DUODECIM] FINAL FANTASY

Forget the stupid title. Aside from the unfortunate shortage of new content, this sequel to the fan-service-packed original is a top-notch action RPG that was snubbed last year, no doubt affected by the PSP's atrocious piracy rates. Nevertheless, it comes packaged with the first game, so get it if you have the chance.

have spent hours training this character up before the event occurred. It didn't matter. This character was wiped out of the story. Such a brave decision would be the defining moment, and it stunned this new generation of JRPG fans, and is still the subject of much conversation today.

It is odd that Square Enix declined to comment on the sequence, having done so in the past – even Kitase himself, back in 2003. It could be that the company is hoping new gamers discover *Final Fantasy VII* through the PlayStation Store, or that something new involving the game is in the pipeline. Either way, that moment was designed by Square to create a sudden void in the player, to make them think they'd have acted differently were they to know it was coming.

There are more surprises besides, though. A major plot point some way into the game sees the threat level raised significantly as giant creatures,

of a talented group of people, sharing a potent creative culture. We asked Kitase about the team's dynamic at the time.

"Before *FFVII* we only really had 2D pixel art designers, but for this project many 3D CG specialists and designers came in from outside the company, leading to an interaction of various working cultures that was very stimulating," he says. "All the in-house designers also started to learn to use CG tools, and we held a lot of seminars and explanation meetings. I personally received instruction in how to use Alias PowerAnimator, and around a tenth of all the character motions seen in the game's event scenes were actually created by me!"

We had to ask Kitase if anything changed in development – and, as it happens, Square had a relatively airtight vision of *FFVII*, with only one change that fans will definitely have noticed.

“WHEN THINKING ABOUT A MODERN TAKE ON A POWERFUL EVIL, WE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF A CORPORATION”

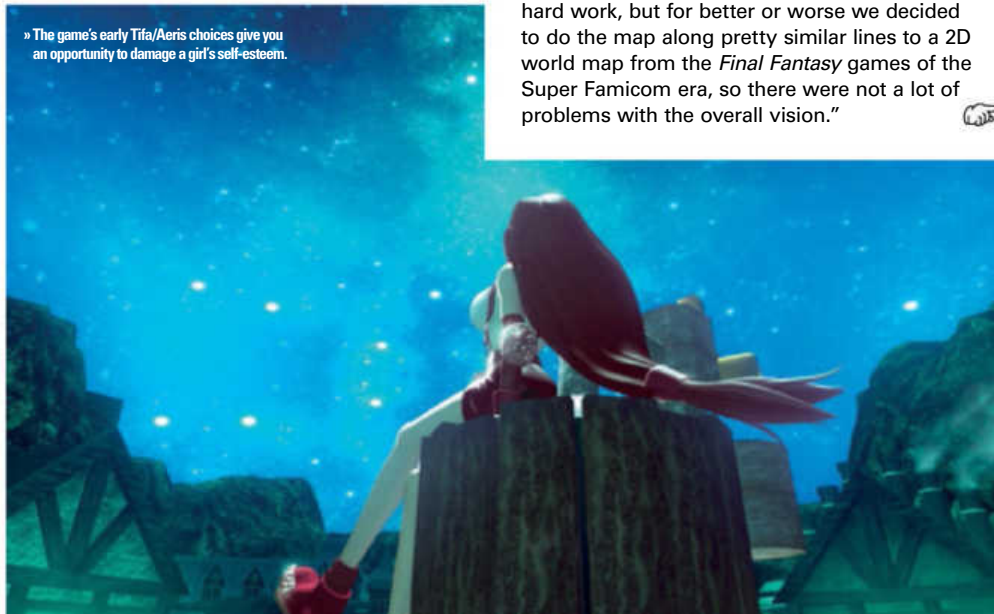
a super-boss motif of the series known as Weapons, march into the overworld and heighten the drama of the closing act. The Emerald and Ruby Weapons are especially tough to beat, yet incorporating these powerful entities as part of the Sephiroth storyline imbued them with a new importance. Kitase explains why the team opted to do this: "In all *Final Fantasy* games, we always put in very powerful monsters in the latter parts of the game to challenge dedicated players and to deepen the gameplay experience, enhancing the longevity of the title and giving something to do aside from the main quest. We had already got the concept of the Weapons as defenders of the planet for *FFVII* and so decided to tie that together with these play-enhancing features."

But the story, despite forever being the guiding light for the *Final Fantasy* series, was matched by *FFVII*'s immense technical and mechanical advances. Creating a masterpiece of this calibre, with such scope in setting and the jaw-dropping amount of iconography that would define Japanese RPGs from there on, was the product

"The only thing that we had to change during development was the level of deformation on the characters. The fact that the characters are depicted at different levels of deformation in the field, battle and CG sections is a remnant of these changes." Whereas field characters ended up being blocky 3D models, the characters in battle had far more detail. As Kitase mentions, too, you can see this difference in CG movies – some depict the characters in blocky form, while others, like Sephiroth before the flames of Nibelheim, are more impressively realised. It's a curious inconsistency, but of course forgivable in the face of the finished product's other achievements.

The locations have aged better, thanks to the heavy use of prerendered backgrounds. Yet part of *Final Fantasy VII*'s appeal to long-time fans was the introduction of a fully 3D world map. Despite the cinematic touches present in other parts of the experience, the world map was seen as an updated version of the SNES overworld. "This part of the game was not actually all that much of a challenge," says Kitase. "It goes without saying that, at the time, creating data for a 3D map was hard work, but for better or worse we decided to do the map along pretty similar lines to a 2D world map from the *Final Fantasy* games of the Super Famicom era, so there were not a lot of problems with the overall vision."

» The game's early Tifa/Aeris choices give you an opportunity to damage a girl's self-esteem.



With insight from Final Fantasy VII's art director, Yusuke Naora, we pick out key locations from the story



DEVELOPER COMMENTARY FORGOTTEN CAPITAL

"As this was to be the location for some of the most important scenes, it needed to be eerie, spiritual and made up from a more limited number of elements. In order to convey the idea of long dead civilisations, we used the motif of the fossilised prehistoric sea bed, with architecture based on giant shells."

WUTAI

THE NORTHERN CRATER

FORGOTTEN CAPITAL

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY MIDGAR

"The overall silhouette of Midgar was inspired by looking at a pizza I was eating with friends while I was stuck for design ideas. For the Shinra building, the overall sense of scale came from looking up every day at our company offices and also had features taken from structures where practicality influences the design, such as the bridge of a battleship and industrial furnaces."



ROCKET TOWN

COREL

COSTA DEL SOL

MIDGAR

NIBELHEIM

JUNON

COSMO CANYON

GOLD SAUCER

GONGAGA

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY COSMO CANYON

"The concept of this area had been finalised as a valley and observatory like the Grand Canyon, so I had the designers put in more of a medieval feel, with fantasy elements such as the clockwork 'cosmic spheres' planetarium and the gyroscope compass."



DEVELOPER COMMENTARY GOLD SAUCER

"As there were a lot of mini-games in the title, I set the question of, 'What would an amusement park in this world be like?' and made sure everyone had fun when designing this area."



□ JUNON

A port town that is also a military base, Junon is attacked later on by Sapphire Weapon, where the giant Junon cannon ceremoniously takes it down.

□ THE NORTHERN CRATER

This is where Jenova landed about 2,000 years before the start of the story – a creepy, expansive crater where the climax of the game takes place.

□ NIBELHEIM

As more observant players will know, after Nibelheim was burnt down by Sephiroth, the entire town was rebuilt by Shinra and the citizens replaced with its employees in a cover-up.

□ COSTA DEL SOL

An utterly bizarre, Spanish-style holiday town with a relaxed atmosphere, players could later buy an overpriced house in this pleasantly different part of the world map.

□ GONGAGA

This sad little town is the location of an exploded Mako reactor, with the citizens mourning their lost. Like a sister town of Nibelheim, in a strange way.

□ WUTAI

A more culturally differentiated locale to everywhere else, Wutai is the sole town on the far western continent, and marks the only location where the heroes team up with the Turks.

□ COREL

Barret's hometown-turned-post-Shinra-wreck, this is where you can catch the lift to the far more jolly Gold Saucer. There's a ruddy superb chase sequence here later in the game, too.

□ ROCKET TOWN

Built around a launchpad, this is where one of the more interesting characters, foul-mouthed pilot Cid Highwind, hails from. It's a cheerful moment when they finally get the rocket into space.



» Aeris is the most innocent character in the story, and remains massively popular with fans.



CONSTANTIN JUPP
Assistant producer,
Media Molecule

“*Final Fantasy VII* made me realise that games were so

much more than just running or shooting or fighting. Far from mindless entertainment, they could actually stir emotion within the player. It's the game that inspired me to join the games industry and help create those experiences for others.”

Instead, the team had to spend more time worrying about the individual locations themselves, which were significantly more imaginative than their cartridge-based forebears. “It was actually a lot harder and took much more work realising the fully rendered backdrops for the towns and dungeons, as nothing like these had ever been done before at the time. Having said this, the world map in *FFVII* did play a very important role in the game. After the first part, which is spent in the oppressive and cramped environment of Midgar, the feeling of liberation and freedom at the moment when you step out

“IT TOOK A LOT OF WORK REALISING THE RENDERED BACKDROPS, AS NOTHING LIKE THEM HAD BEEN DONE BEFORE”

onto the world map is one of the game's most memorable highlights.” That's completely true, and this was a stone's throw from making it into our list of favourite moments. *FFVII* progressively puts more power in the player's hands through the way they interact with the world.

Random battles would remain part of the series, but as directed by the SIGGRAPH presentation, the actual look of them marked an exciting leap

between generations. “We had decided on the idea of battles in 3D, with the camera panning and zooming around the action, from before beginning development on *FFVII*. In 1995, we created a prototype game based on doing the battles from *FFVI* in 3D and showcased it at the SIGGRAPH convention that year. This test game was made with an eye to perfecting the idea for the battles in *FFVII*.”

Aided by the straightforward yet endlessly customisable Materia-based ability system, as well as visually extravagant Limit Break attacks, the combat in *Final Fantasy VII* would never become a chore. This title also saw the best work of composer Nobuo Uematsu, building on his incredible music in *FFVI* with a series of stunning and highly memorable themes and leitmotifs. Any poignant, dark or pleasant instance is helped along enormously by his work, and he made an easy collaborator for Square. “We basically just showed Mr Uematsu the character designs and the scenario, and had him familiarise with the overall themes and images of the game before letting him loose. There were no specific detailed

requests, and he was allowed to create the score comparatively freely,” says Kitase.

While HD technology and high-capacity storage media has let Square Enix realise the most elaborate of visions with *Final Fantasy*, there is something pure about the seventh game. It's such a well-rounded experience that it's obviously the product of a developer at a peak of creativity. Being the first *Final Fantasy* released in Europe, and armed with a slightly misleading marketing campaign that focused on FMVs over gameplay, it turned a historically marginalised genre into an international phenomenon.

That's why there's always talk of a remake. Yet gamers clamouring for this must surely realise the potential for disappointment – *Final Fantasy VII* was a product of the CD-ROM era, and everything was built on that foundation. To try to replicate that in today's HD landscape would be a fun curio, sure, but we're almost certain that it wouldn't surpass the original.

Still, the constant talk of revisiting the game is a testament to gamers' attachment to this world, to these characters, and to the themes of identity, life and death that no other entry in the series has matched. It is a masterpiece, born in the midst of Square enjoying the technological revolution laid before it, and justifiably becoming synonymous with the PlayStation platform. For the company, the project was a risk that paid off supremely, but more profoundly for *FFVII*'s receptive audience, it showed them that videogames could offer a journey beyond that of any other medium.

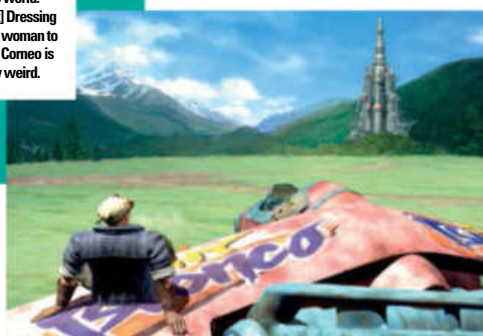
Special thanks to Roxana Etemad for her huge amount of help with this feature.



» [Top right] The Forgotten Capital is a bizarre locale, and is still the most atmospheric part of this world.
» [Bottom left] Dressing Cloud up as a woman to impress Don Corneo is still bloody weird.



“Listen, the Don's not interested in men. So just get the hell outta here.”



The Anatomy of CLOUD

He carries a big sword and always seems miserable, but just how much do you know about Final Fantasy poster boy Cloud?

SWORD & SORCERY

Though there is a whole load of swords for you to equip to Cloud that you gather throughout the game, none are as iconic as his famous starting weapon, the gigantic Buster Sword. It'd never work in real life, of course, but then never would Cloud's unfeasibly pointy hair. Besides, *Final Fantasy VII* is a game about a half-alien madman trying to destroy the planet being stopped by a magic wielding team that includes a man with a gun for an arm and a talking cat. In other words, forget about realism and embrace that badass sword.

TROUBLE & STRIFE

A poster boy for angst, Cloud's sullen demeanour early on in *Final Fantasy VII* has earned him a not-undeserved reputation as being a bit of an arse. As the game progresses, however, Cloud softens up a little as we get to know his backstory and the arrogant, uncaring front he puts up is broken down. Cloud begins as a former member of elite military unit SOLDIER, working as a mercenary for freedom fighters AVALANCHE. However, there's more to Cloud's past than meets the eye...

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Cloud is unquestionably the best character in *Final Fantasy VII* from a gameplay perspective, in part because he's an all-rounder with high stats in all categories. He's got good attack power, meaning you'll probably want him in the front row to dish out damage. But he's also the second best magic caster after Aeris, so you can focus on magic with him if you choose. If that's not enough, Cloud's got the most powerful Limit Breaks in the game, his signature move and final Limit Break being the devastating Omnislash.

SUPERSTAR

As well as being the protagonist of *Final Fantasy VII*, Cloud has made a number of other appearances. He appeared in the *Final Fantasy* themed fighting game *Dissidia Final Fantasy*, *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts 2*, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy* and *Chocobo Racing*, amongst others. He's even made an appearance in a film (albeit a rubbish one) in the form of *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.



PaRappa The Rapper

"KICK! PUNCH! IT'S ALL IN THE MIND"



- » PlayStation
- » NanaOn-Sha
- » 1996

Masaya Matsuura may not have created the rhythm genre when

he unleashed his cute rapping puppy, but he arguably popularised it and brought it to the attention of the gaming masses.

The core mechanics of *PaRappa The Rapper* are still widely used today, but in 1996 they were incredibly innovative, fusing gameplay to music in a way that few previous games had been able to successfully manage.

Matsuura's game is ridiculous fun, telling the tale of our titular hero who wants to steal the irresistible Sunny Funny away from his canine rival Joe Chin. What follows is a genuinely hilarious adventure that sees PaRappa rapping

his way through karate lessons, a driving test and even a toilet queue, before finally making his debut on stage in an attempt to win Sunny Funny's flowery heart.

Gameplay is fairly basic and revolves around hitting buttons in time to the music's beat. There are only six stages, but *PaRappa's* clever ranking system – you'll drop one of four ranks if you mess up two lines in a row and must then play well for two lines to reclaim it – ensures that the game has plenty of replay value. And that's before you even delve into the freestyling that's unlocked after completing the game.

Brought to life by the distinctive artwork of Rodney Greenlat – Matsuura and Greenlat insisted it retained its 2D look – and featuring a range of superb tunes, *PaRappa The Rapper* is as entertaining as it is innovative. ★

» RETROREVIEWAL



U rappin' GOOD!

COOL
BAD
AWFUL

ool! Yes!!

鉄拳 TEKKEN

One of the trailblazing 3D fighters of its time, the Tekken series continues to pack a punch to this day. Luke Albigés goes head-to-head with series producer and director Katsuhiro Harada to learn about the origins of the King Of Iron Fist Tournament

If there's one thing we've learned over the years, it's that there's no tangible benefit to being first to the party in the technology market. But Sega, more than any other company, seems to have suffered from failing to recognise this trend.

Saturn beat PlayStation to the punch, but Sony still dominated the generation through clever marketing and better third-party support. Dreamcast versus PS2 was a similar story, with many skipping Sega's dinky white classic to wait for the follow-up to a proven success. And even when it came to ushering the one-on-one fighting genre into the third dimension, Sega was once again first on the scene with *Virtua Fighter*. But with a novel gimmick in its 'one button per limb' configuration and the good fortune to back the more popular console, Namco's *Tekken* series would come to be the very definition of what a 3D fighting game should be.

With the industry shifting rapidly from 2D to 3D at the time, it's no real surprise that excitement was so high

around games like *VF* and *Tekken* – that extra dimension offered fighters unprecedented tactical options while showing off the latest tech beautifully, although we were surprised to hear that *Tekken* was originally designed around the latter rather than the former. "Tekken was a project to develop technology for use in 3D character animation, rather than as a 3D fighting game," reveals series overlord Katsuhiro Harada, the veteran producer and director who has been on the series since it began. "We reworked the game drastically around *Tekken 3* to make it more of a proper 3D fighting game."

Through some combination of innate skill, blind luck, experience and novelty value, though, everything came together to make *Tekken* seem like one of those glimpses of the future – a moment where you see past a game's problems and appreciate it for what it means for the next era of gaming. Or, in this case, just a supremely enjoyable early 3D fighter at a time when nobody else had really stepped in to show the world how the genre was supposed to be done.



THE HISTORY OF TEKKEN



鉄拳

» A perfect run on the *Galaga* loading game unlocks a secret character.



► Going back to it today, the original *Tekken* (and indeed to a lesser degree the second one too) does feel rough around the edges, but with so many less capable teams putting out horrible 3D beat-'em-ups to try and cash in on the new craze, *Tekken* would only have felt even more accomplished by comparison. "Rather than being well received as a fighting game, I was well aware that games of that era were more highly regarded for the 3D polygon and other graphics technology," Harada tells us, pinning a lot of the game's early popularity on it being the right kind of graphical showcase in the right place at the right time.

Namco was locked into that right place from an early stage, its arcade division developing boards based on PlayStation technology before the platform had even been released to prove itself. "There wasn't another option to consider," Harada confirms. "Most people knew that platform as PlayStation, but we developed the PlayStation hardware-compatible arcade board, System 11, along with SCE before the release of the PlayStation." A risk, then, but a calculated one and with PlayStation the strongest of the then-forthcoming consoles in terms of 3D tech – the route Namco was exploring with games like *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken* – the team simply latched onto the most obvious partner. Which, as the history books will tell you, worked out pretty well. Whereas even established greats like *Street Fighter* and *The King Of Fighters* would struggle to find their footing on PlayStation, Namco read the market brilliantly and as such had a fighter at the forefront of Sony's revolution to make gaming cool.

From an outsider's perspective, it seems to be an extremely competitive market, but Harada is quick to downplay this. "If asked whether there is a rivalry with other fighting games, maybe most won't understand this, but in the arcade game sector, we are rivals but also comrades," he reasons. "For companies that operate arcades, not only do you need your own games to be successful, but also those of rival companies as well. That's why they are more like brothers-in-arms



» Jack will always get battered by faster characters. So, everyone else.

|| We make at least as much, if not more, from our arcade releases of Tekken ||

Katsuhiro Harada, Bandai Namco

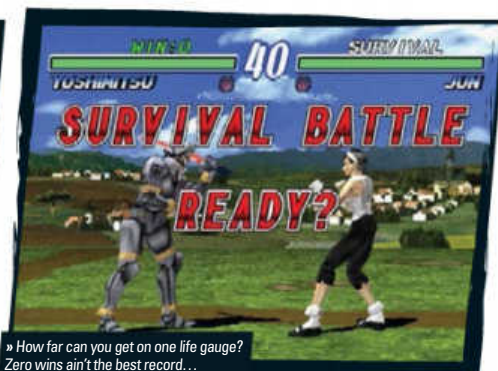
rather than rivals. It shows lack of understanding when people try to say there is rivalry or bad blood there. Often, events for several games are held at the same time." Perhaps it's less a competitive scene and more a somewhat symbiotic one, then – each fighter needs others to succeed as well in order to maintain popularity and awareness for the genre as a whole. "Even if someone feels hostile towards a rival, that just shows their own shortcomings. That said, it is entertaining as a performance," he chuckles, as we recall his staged spats with *Street Fighter* boss Yoshinori Ono in the lead-up to the launch of *Street Fighter X Tekken* – for all the trash talk, cosplay, hashtags and other daft feigned rivalry there, the pair were always complimentary of one another's work when asked directly.

As much as the market may have changed a lot in the last 20 years, Harada himself doesn't seem to think he has. "I've just gotten older, I think," he smiles. "My role hasn't changed that much. Perhaps going to the arcade to promote the game and for the events is something I don't do anymore. In regards to marketing and PR, conceptual design, game design and project management, these are some of the roles I have always had. I've been a bit bossy, even when I was young."

Given the enormous popularity of *Tekken* both in arcades and on PlayStation, a sequel was always on the cards. Indeed, *Tekken 2* was one of the most anticipated titles of the early PlayStation era, with the kind of magazine coverage and pre-release buzz that you seldom see for a franchise which is only one game old. With that in mind, it's odd to hear that Namco was still going at it from a very tech-minded point of view. "It was basically decided by focusing on what new technology we wanted to implement," recalls Harada when discussing the approach to creating the second game. But it wasn't all polygon counts and bullet points – gameplay still counted, as anyone who has played the improved sequel will recognise. But the PlayStation audience was still too young to be trusted, so Namco took gameplay advice from a more established, reliable source instead. "Regarding the game as a fighting game, we based our decisions on feedback from questionnaires in the arcade," states Harada.

"The arcade is a very severe market," he continues. "Consumers only pay you 100 Yen at a time to play. You don't get 50 dollars right away – you have to have them keep coming back. That means your game has to be extremely fun to survive. Fighting games raised in this environment are more entertaining and more balanced as a result." Even so, it's a tough market to crack from this angle today, with the cost of console development alone being prohibitive enough for many smaller teams before you even factor in anything like arcade boards. Plus, there's the small fact that the arcade scene isn't what it used to be, though Harada doesn't seem to see this as a worldwide problem.

"Many people say arcades are dead," he muses. "Maybe in the West, that is somewhat true. But they are still around in the Eastern hemisphere, especially Asia. They are even increasing in South-east Asia. Console releases of *Tekken* sell millions of copies each so you might think it is quite lucrative, right? Maybe even more



THE HISTORY OF TEKKEN

than the arcades? But, that is not true. You only receive 50 dollars for a console title, maybe up to 100 including DLC, and then you're done. But hit games in the arcade keep on performing. We make about as much as the console release when we sell the initial game and arcade cabinet, but then keep profiting as the game continues to perform in the arcade. Most people don't know that we make at least as much, if not much more from our arcade releases of *Tekken*. Are you surprised?"

Yes. Yes we are, actually, but we're even more surprised to hear that the money made here is poured right back into the franchise in the form of console extras. "The revenue gained from the arcade is then invested into the development of the console version," reveals Harada. "That is why compared to other fighting games, *Tekken* is able to have more bonus modes, customisation features, bonus BGM and additional characters at no added cost to the consumer. So many console consumers often never realise the benefit they are receiving from *Tekken* being in the arcade. That is basically why we develop in this cycle. That's probably also why *Tekken* has survived for 20 years now."

Even though *Street Fighter X Tekken* promotion is long since finished, Harada can't seem to help but take one last friendly pop at Ono in summarising his argument. "One of my favourite franchises, the *Street Fighter* series, didn't see a new instalment for ten years in between *Street Fighter III* [and] *Street Fighter IV*," he recalls. "However, we are also an arcade operator, so we were able to generate revenue to keep updating the *Tekken* franchise with new instalments. That's essentially why *Tekken* has generated the most income in the arcades in the past 20 years of any fighting games, and sold over 43 million console copies worldwide, making it the most successful fighting game franchise. I think that proves the strategy chosen was the correct one."

As the smug grin subsides, we move onto the third game, one widely renowned as one of the best of its time. As previously stated, it was around this time that Harada and his team really started to focus on gameplay to the same degree as presentation and it shows – there's a level of depth here that arguably wouldn't be beaten until *Virtua Fighter 4* rolled around some time later. It's the best performer out of all of the *Tekken* games too, but is it the best? Harada offers a surprisingly diplomatic response, considering we've effectively just asked him to review his own children. "*Tekken 3* did very well in the arcades, and sold well for many years on the console," he says. "The console sales ended up being 8.3 million copies! If you just look at the numbers, I guess you could say *Tekken 3* was the most



» Lei's a flashy fighter, but few can master his confusing multiple stances.

» The training mode in the third game was as comprehensive as any other.



GET THE PRIZE

A handful of the other crazy tournaments from the rest of gaming



SUPER MARIO KART

■ We've seen just how keen residents of the Mushroom Kingdom are to try out all kinds of different pastimes, but you'd think the governing body behind this racing tournament would screen its drivers – known criminals, kidnappers, vandals and hoodlums are as free to compete as the squeaky clean guys.



RIBBIT KING

■ The world is running low on fuel. The solution? Give away what scraps remain as prizes in a interplanetary Frolf competition. What is Frolf, you ask? It's golf played with frogs rather than balls, the little croakers hopping around of their own accord after a shot. This PS2/GameCube oddity is a technical mess, but it's a riot in multiplayer.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT

■ There's a delicious aftertaste of irony in the fact that a game based around a virtual sports event for the pleasure of others became one of the first major games on the eSports scene. Few players will remember the premise, though, because it just simply doesn't matter. It's just a damn fine multiplayer shooter.



POKÉMON

■ The rules aren't quite as well defined here as they are for most competitions – it seems to be the case that whoever beats the Elite Four and the reigning champ gets to call themselves the champion, even though the king is never actually dethroned. Still, that epic journey to catch 'em all and beat the best is one we could (and do) play over and over.



FINAL FANTASY X

■ Battle tournaments are commonplace in role-playing games, but this is something quite different. While Blitzball wasn't the primary focus of *FFX* (or at least wasn't meant to be – curse our addictive personalities), Tidus's backstory and the rewards from playing made grinding out entire seasons essential for a 100 per cent run.



CHAOS

■ The Wizard's Duel in *The Sword In The Stone* has nothing on this, Julian Gollop's Spectrum masterpiece pitting up to eight wizards against one another in the ultimate test of wits, cunning and Goopy Blobs. Crowdfunding on a brand new Chaos game has not long begun – hopefully, we won't have invested too much in an illusion this time.

鉄拳

KILLER COMBOS

The ten-hit strings we'll never forget



► successful. I have a lot of good personal memories from that instalment as well. That said, I don't consider it as the best *Tekken*. 5 and 6 were also quite successful and well received. They even maintained the top spot in the arcades for five consecutive years."

As you can probably gather, Harada won't offer a personal favourite, rather reasoning that he learns from creating each iteration. *Tekken 3*'s assortment of odd extra modes, from bizarre mini-game *Tekken Ball* to chicken-flavoured side-scrolling mode *Tekken Force*, offered value far beyond the simple arcade ports that were common, and were as we've now learned funded by the game's coin-op success. But what was it that made the team want to give something back to the community like this? Harada's answer is succinct.

"The omotenashi (hospitality) mentality of Japanese," he states. "At the time, Namco was raking in money, and arcades were doing extremely well. Since the consumers were giving us so much support, it was only natural to do our utmost to please them in return." This kickstarted a revolution in fighters too, with Time Attack and Arcade modes no longer enough – players demanded more, leading to console-only fighters like later *Mortal Kombat* games offering crazy amounts of single-player and unlockable content. Many of the additional modes were simply throwaway novelties, but even the most whimsical of them all had a grounding in the core fighting experience. "Tekken Ball was the result of me originally trying to make a mini-game to practice aerial combos," Harada explains – we can process that, but any attempt to link a hardcore 3D fighting game and ten-pin bowling continues to blow our tiny minds.

No franchise can go 20 years without a disaster or ten, though, and Harada's go-to example came pretty early on in the series' life. "There's one memory that stands out," he says when asked about developmental developments. "At the time, a person who was like a leader of development quit and joined another company, taking many of the designers and programmers that had joined the company at the same time as me. I was very surprised!" It's not uncommon in this industry, but we can't imagine this kind of observation makes it any easier to deal with this kind of mass exodus. "We were actually put in the position that we were unable to develop the next *Tekken* or *Soul Blade*," Harada reveals. "It took much effort to rebuild the development team. We had to redo everything, basically starting from scratch."



» Marduk's ground-and-pound MMA style feels really weighty and brutal.



In game development, failures often teach us quite a lot

Katsuhiro Harada

This might go some way to explaining the next two games in the timeline – *Tekken Tag Tournament* was effectively a greatest hits package with a neat new mechanic, while *Tekken 4* went wildly off-template and made fundamental changes to several crucial aspects of the game, attracting a fair amount of criticism for doing so. We ask whether Sony had wanted *Tag* to be a launch title for the PlayStation 2 following the successful collaboration between the two brands the generation before, but Harada laughs off the idea. “There wasn’t much discussion on whether to make *Tekken Tag* a launch title,” he tells us. “That was the role of *Ridge Racer*. *Tag* just came along at the right time.”

Similarly, the question of making the non-insignificant leap from PlayStation hardware to PS2 (with its all-powerful Emotion Engine) seems equally easy for the *Tekken* boss, but then he wouldn’t have been the one doing the coding. “There wasn’t much that we had trouble with regarding the technology,” he says. “Actually, the tough part was that the number of polygons increased drastically, and we were struggling to find a way to use this increased power effectively.”

But find it they did – *Tekken Tag* looked great at the time and *4* looked even better when it turned up, even if it did follow the odd mantra of ‘if it’s not broke, fix it until it is’. As is always the case, some gamers who hadn’t really gotten on with the series in the past will tell you how much they love this one that breaks from tradition, but the majority wanted tradition back. Moving the emphasis away from juggle combos and onto spatial positioning was an interesting move but not one that paid off, although that doesn’t seem to have hurt the franchise. If anything, it has actually helped. “It was because of the failure of *Tekken 4* that we are successful today,” Harada claims. “In game development, failures often teach us quite a lot. That’s why I think there was a lot of things in that game that are worth looking at.”

After *4*, it’s hardly surprising that core series *Tekken* games haven’t taken any risks, at least not to that level

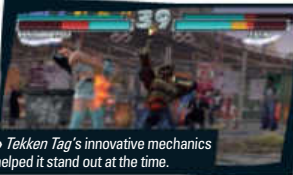
– the Rage mechanic of *Tekken 6* sails a little too close to today’s odd obsession with comeback mechanics, but it’s no better, worse or more effective than Garou’s TOP system so we’ll let it go. Both *Tekken 5* and *6* played things relatively safe, the core fighting returning to the template laid out by *3* and with all the same kind of frippery laid about around it to keep fans happy whether they were fighting or not. Customisation was the big new thing – *SoulCalibur*’s creation suite it may not be, but the dress-up mode in modern *Tekken* games is still fun to play around with all the same.

And so we come to *Tekken*’s latest outing. No, not the iOS card game, although that is surprisingly good fun. We’re talking about *Tekken Revolution*, the free-to-play PS3 game that has already been downloaded by over 3 million players. It just goes to show how much the world has changed – *Tekken 3* sells over 8 million but today, Namco can only give away 3 million copies of *Revolution* – but Harada seems happy with how it’s all going. “We were able to gain a lot of feedback, so I am satisfied,” he states, but he does have an odd confession to make. “If I were to give my honest answer to whether fighting games are well suited to F2P, I would say no. This is because the basic game model was born in the arcade, coin operation-based environment from 20 years ago. Currently popular genres such as team battles, four-player co-op and RPGs are probably better suited. Or perhaps changing the fundamental gameplay, like in *SoulCalibur: Lost Swords*.”

Even two decades on, Harada still has a passion for his franchise and a bunch of interesting new ideas on where to take it. The free-to-play experiment isn’t the sign of the end of *Tekken* as we know it either. *Tekken 7* is currently going great guns in Japanese arcades and will inevitably head to consoles in the not too distant future, particularly as it’s built on Unreal Engine 4 hardware. And best of all, two decades in, Harada still dreams big. “To create a game which everyone says ‘Now that is exactly what I have been waiting for!’ That is my goal,” he closes. ★



» Tekken Force: rubbish no matter how much better it looks on new hardware.



» Tekken Tag’s innovative mechanics helped it stand out at the time.



» Tag’s evolution allows for some insane combos once you master the engine.

SPECIAL MOVIES

The fighters that have tried (and failed) to take on Hollywood

STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE (1994)

■ A classic for all the wrong reasons, with a script written by someone who had no idea about the game. Raul Julia’s final role serves up the best bits – “For you, the day Bison graced your village was the most important day of your life,” he taunts Chun-Li. “But for me, it was Tuesday.”



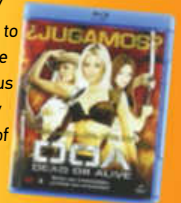
MORTAL KOMBAT (1995)

■ Some fighter-based movies shy away from the hokey nonsense that surrounds the game’s ludicrous canon, but *Mortal Kombat* fully embraces it and it works. It’s still rubbish, obviously, but in terms of sheer fun, the *Mortal Kombat* movies are among the best examples of videogame-based silver screen silliness going.



DOA: DEAD OR ALIVE (2006)

■ The only movie here to really ‘get’ its source material, *DOA* is a gratuitous 87 minutes of teen titillation thanks to sexy ladies, buff dudes and more sexy ladies squaring off in various unsuitable outfits. Jaime Pressly kills it as Tina – too bad the rest of the bunch are either terribly cast or just terrible by comparison.



THE KING OF FIGHTERS (2010)

■ Once again we turn to the casting department with a giant question mark over our heads – casting an American dude as Kyo, Maggie Q as Mai and Ray Park (aka *Star Wars* baddie Darth Maul and Toad in *X-Men*) as big boss man Rugal. We’re surprised they didn’t get Stephen Fry to play Terry Bogard. Perhaps he was busy.



TEKKEN (2010)

■ The characters’ nonsensical back-stories and reasons for competing in the Iron Fist should make for an awesome movie before the fights even start. But director Dwight H Little plays things a bit too straight here – this is far from the worst movie on this rundown, but perhaps the most forgettable.





ROGUES GALLERY

A cross section of Tekken's enormous cast

1 KING
F/S: Wrestling

2 CHRISTIE
F/S: Capoeira

3 MOKUJIN
F/S: MokuJin-ken

4 LARS
F/S: Karate

5 PANDA
F/S: Advanced Bear Fighting

6 BOB
F/S: Freestyle Karate

7 BRUCE
F/S: Muay Thai Kickboxing

8 ALISA
F/S: Humanoid Cyborg Combat

9 ZAFINA
F/S: Ancient Assassination Arts

10 NINA
F/S: Koppo

11 PAUL
F/S: Judo

12 STEVE
F/S: Boxing

13 LAW
F/S: Jeet Kune Do

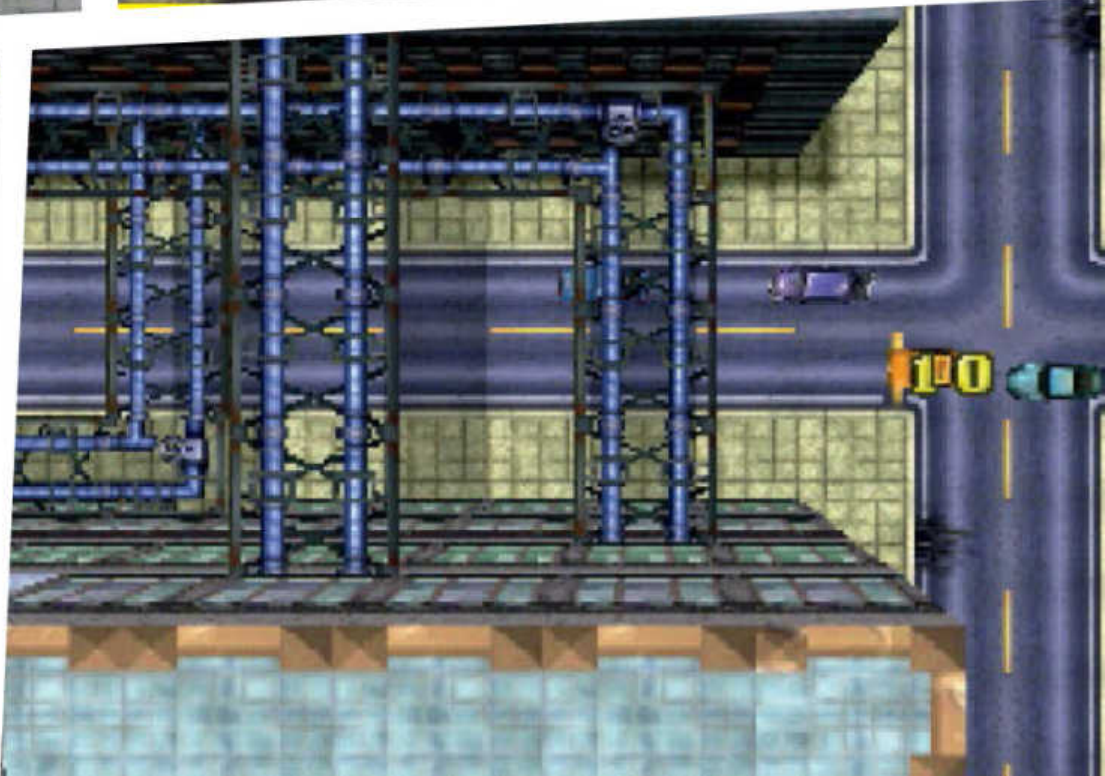
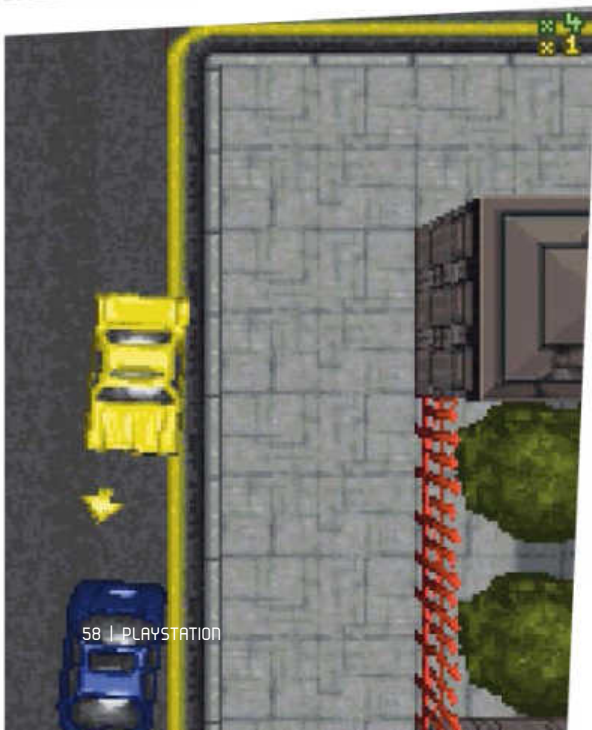
14 RAVEN
F/S: Ninjitsu

15 ASUKA
F/S: Kazama Style traditional



F/S = FIGHTING STYLE

- | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| 16 HWOARANG
F/S: Taekwondo | 19 ARMOR KING
F/S: Wrestling | 22 LILI
F/S: Street fighting | 25 BAEK
F/S: Taekwondo | 28 MIGUEL
F/S: Brawling |
| 17 JIN
F/S: Karate | 20 EDDY
F/S: Capoeira | 23 XIAOYU
F/S: Hakke Sho/ Hika Ken | 26 KUMA
F/S: Advanced Bear Fighting | 29 WANG
F/S: Xing Yi Quan |
| 18 KAZUYA
F/S: Advanced Mishima style | 21 LEO
F/S: Bajiquan | 24 HEIKACHI
F/S: Mishima-Style Karate | 27 ANNA
F/S: Koppo | 30 JULIA
F/S: Kenpo/Wushu |



THE MAKING OF: METAL SLUG

GRAND THEFT AUTO



It was 1997. The UK was on a high. The general election that year had brought about the end of a Conservative government and the beginning of what was said to be a new era. British music was thriving to the point that a fresh movement – Britpop – had been created, with the UK even winning the Eurovision Song Contest. JK Rowling released the first of her *Harry Potter* novels, *The Philosopher's Stone*. The phrase 'Cool Britannia' may have become rather tiresome, with *The Economist* saying the following year that the public had grown sick of it, but it sure encapsulated the mood of the time.

Gaming formed part of this British creative wave. *WipEout* was enthralling clubgoers, boys were lusting after Lara and, fresh from releasing the classic *Lemmings*, DMA Design was sensing a change in the way games were being perceived. Dave Jones, DMA's co-founder, felt gaming should tap into the wider world of entertainment. He wanted people with an interest in film, music, books and a broader sense of popular culture to play. More than that, DMA wanted people to forget that they were playing a game and immerse themselves into an environment instead.

The DMA team cracked on with a city simulator. Programmer Mike Dailly

Grand Theft Auto, inevitably branded an "evil game" by the Daily Mail, needs little introduction. But, as David Crookes discovers, what has grown into one of Britain's greatest gaming exports was never initially intended to shock

produced a prototype on his 486 PC, working with an isometric viewpoint and all of the action on foot due to issues getting vehicles around the city. But when it came to actually playing this early prototype, it was deemed too slow. It didn't help that *Syndicate Wars* looked similar, so Mike went back to the drawing board and created a second prototype, this time from a side-on perspective.

A short while later, Mike spoke to John Whyte, the lead programmer of *Body Harvest* for the N64. Whyte had wanted to create a top-down racer but Jones wasn't interested, yet it got Mike thinking. Adding a floor to his side-on demo, he turned his second prototype from a side-on view to a top-down perspective. Then, using the first prototype as a base, he built perspective points using cubes to produce a pseudo-3D effect. DMA's management

team loved it, and the new game, entitled *Race'N'Chase*, was given the go-ahead.

In 1995, DMA drew up design documents for the title. Aiming "to produce a fun, addictive and fast multiplayer car racing and crashing game which uses a novel graphics method" and set in the present day, the developers had an idea for three cities, each with their own graphical style. The game was to be packed with missions. There were, the document detailed, to be pedestrians. Such bystanders could be run over by cars. Players could also get out of cars and steal other. And this would attract the attention of any nearby police.

The initial meetings about the direction of the game turned out to be somewhat

chaotic. "The only agreed direction was that we were basically writing a game that we would want to play ourselves," says lead programmer Keith Hamilton. "Everything had to be interactive. The player had to be able to drive any vehicle he could find. Nothing was to be off-limits. We wanted fun situations to present themselves just by all the elements coming together, not necessarily in ways that were specially designed."

About the only thing they could decide upon at this stage was that the top-down view was the best way forward, nixing suggestions of using full 3D from a very early stage. DMA wanted whatever game was made to be delivered over multiple platforms – the PlayStation, PC and, originally, the Saturn – and while it was theoretically possible to do 3D on the PC, the console versions simply wouldn't support it. "The choices were to more or less develop two different game engines,

or focus on making the game as rich and deep and fun as we could on an engine that would run across all of the platforms," recalls writer Brian Baglow. "So we did that. I think it was the right decision."

Although design documents existed, much of the game was made up on the spur of the moment. "The



IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: BMG INTERACTIVE

» DEVELOPER: DMA DESIGN

» PLATFORM: PC, PLAYSTATION, GAME BOY COLOR

» RELEASED: 1997

» GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE



» The phone boxes enabled the many missions to form a seamless part of the gameplay.

game evolved," explains Mike. "It was a true 'team-designed' game." Each design decision therefore became an experiment. The 'eureka' moment came when the team thought about the player leaving their own car and getting into a different one. They realised that, because the other car wasn't really the player's, they must be a criminal, and so the infamous GTA theme was born.

"We envisaged a straight cops-and-robbers driving game," recalls Brian. "But it went from that to a car-based crime sim and wild sandbox adventure. We initially had the player as a good guy, and it was a long way down the line before the decision to try playing as the criminal was made. And at that point, we could see that there was something in there. Something fun and unique."

As the months went by, DMA's new game, which changed its name to *Grand Theft Auto* mid-project, started to grow. A lot of fresh talent was hired to work on the game, resulting in a very young team.

Despite the inexperience, the ambition remained. The simulation aspects of the game continued to be important, especially for Keith, who felt it was crucial to create a city that the player could see in action and then enjoy interfering with. For this reason, police cars drove all the way from the police station to a crime, while ambulances motored from the hospital and contained little characters with stretchers to pick up bodies. "If

you followed them, you could see that they actually went back to the hospital," says Keith.

The team also planned to have teams of traffic light repairmen who would drive out and fix any traffic lights if you broke them. "We dropped that because it was getting a bit too anal and because players just ignored the traffic lights anyway."

The levels were designed by just three people: Stephen Banks took on San Andreas, Billy Thomson looked after Vice City, and Paul Farley was responsible for Liberty City. Paul had quit a degree in architecture and only envisaged being with DMA Design for six months while he figured out what he wanted to do with his life, and when he started on *GTA* it was little more than an ugly-looking and rather rough demo. Yet while it wasn't the game everyone on

the team wanted to produce – "I think most of us would rather have been working on one of the sexier Nintendo first-party games," says Paul – those working on it soon recognised the game's potential.

"The actual level design was fairly straightforward in the most part," says Paul. "At the time I came on board there were some rough guidelines to the possibilities and limitations of the game engine. The head of art had already written down some core design considerations regarding the flow of space within the game. This helped communicate to the team some of the fundamental aims of the driving part of the game."

The team were big fans of top-down racers like *Super Sprint* and *Micro Machines*, and these games informed

some of the vehicle-handling objectives in the game. "Even from an early stage, we were looking at how to make the driving flow well and be as forgiving as possible – the geometry of the levels plays a huge part in enabling this," continues Paul. "I think we did a good job of both allowing the player space to express themselves and their driving skills, while providing contrasting spaces to support gameplay focused on pedestrian play. A real difficulty was the lack of diagonal road or sidewalk tiles. I know I struggled with some

aspects of Liberty City because of that [very] limitation."

The team was given a lot of freedom on the game's direction. Remarkably, only one person on the team had ever shipped a game before, but despite that, they were handed a huge amount of responsibility and ownership over the title and, says Paul, it helped them make clear and quick decisions. Each of the three level designers took one of the city maps each. "You can clearly see the different approaches coming through both the level design and missions across the three maps," explains Paul. And they had a laugh doing it. "Quite early on, the sense of humour in the team was becoming evident in the game. In keeping with this cheeky nature, it seemed natural to take real-life American cities as our inspiration and send them up a little. I'm sure there are kids that fly into New York for the first time and are more familiar with it as Liberty City. I hope they aren't disappointed; it's an amazing city but not quite like it's portrayed in-game."

The criminal aspects let the imagination of the team run riot. It was possible to mow down a line of Hare Krishnas to earn a 'Gouranga' bonus, for instance. "We could also use the pager and text to tell the players about things that didn't really happen, like with bomb shops and respray shops," adds Brian. "Some cars wouldn't remap, so the idea was going to be dropped. It was suggested giving the player a message saying the plates had been changed instead. Simple, fast and it worked."

Some ideas didn't make it, however.

Vehicles, characters, missions and city locations all

*****ING READ THIS!



GRAND THEFT AUTO sparked a wave of controversy when it was released, and it seems that a penchant to shock ran deep within the team. David Cowan, the lead engineer at Visual Science, was amazed at the text files he received from DMA Design, upon which he was to base his work.

"The PC text files contained all of the mission information and strings that the user would see," he explains, "and they were originally absolutely filthy and full of profanity. I don't know if the PC version shipped with that, but the PSone version was very much sanitised for Sony at the time."

But how bad was it? "One of the lines was something like, 'Look, you stupid mother****er – get your *****ing ass over to the phone booth to get your next *****ing mission,'" he says.

» You had to be quick on your toes, otherwise you'd get busted.

Criminal Record 14 Shunts 'n' Bumps, 3 Hit 'n' Run, 1 Carjacking.

CHASING CONTROVERSY

GRAND THEFT AUTO wasn't originally going to be an adult game. "The decision really came quite late in the day," recalls Paul. BMG Interactive hired Max Clifford to whip things up and it worked a treat. Not only did he deal with the fallout from the controversy, but he gained the game acres of column inches. "I still feel quite bemused about it all, frankly," says Paul. "The game, while having some strong content, had a very obvious tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. This cheeky schoolboy humour combined with the cartoon top-down graphics really made it rather difficult to understand how the game could ever be seen as pushing the boundaries of taste and decency. It was very mild compared to content on TV, film, music and other entertainment media at the time. We knew we had created a great piece of art, an innovative and entertaining game that stood proud on its own merits. We didn't add the mature content to make it successful; it was core to the entire experience and helped it stand out from a crowd of competitors. We were the bad boys, and in a competitive market like videogames, sometimes it pays to be a little nasty."

got cut along the way. "We wanted combine harvesters to mow down pedestrians. We never quite had time for it, so never had to consider the issue of whether that might have been taking things too far," says Keith. As a result, cut-scenes, voiceovers and cinematic sequences were also axed, with the game having just one cut-scene per city for the main bad guys.

"We also ended up losing the original maps, which is a tragedy," continues Brian. "We had created full maps for each town and around the border of each were adverts for local businesses, vouchers and tourist destinations, all made up and in keeping with the style and feel of each city. It's one of the few things I never managed to get a copy of or find when the company became Rockstar North. In my imagination, they were awesome. In real-life... well, we may never know."

Other ideas were in the PC version but dropped for consoles due to hardware limitations. "Speaking for the PlayStation version, we had big problems with the trains mainly due to the way they were implemented on the PC. They used a lot of memory and were only used properly in a few missions, so we had to drop them. It was unfortunate, but we had to live with the realities of the situation," explains PlayStation programmer Russell Kay.

According to Paul, however, the team was fearless. It wasn't scared of failure and it was open to new ideas. Some of the team even wanted missions involving burning churches but, above all, they wanted to give the player a sense of right and wrong. "The player could choose not to act in a certain way if they didn't want to. If we had included missions where you were forced to single out certain groups of people to kill or abuse based on race or religion, that would have been a step too far, and it would

have devalued the player's sense of choice to the detriment of the game and its subsequent success."

One of the problems that faced the team was how best to integrate the missions. The level designers were using fairly complex tools to create fun, challenging and exciting activities for the player, but it ran as a series of challenges

■ ■ We wanted combine harvesters to mow down pedestrians. That might have been taking it too far ■ ■

that were fundamentally unconnected. The game essentially ran along the lines of 'go here, steal this car, drive to this point, leave it, get on a bike, take it to this point' and so on.

So once the missions were in place, it was up to Brian to come up with the specifics of what exactly the player was doing and why.

"This 'plot' or narrative had to be delivered," he explains. "There were no voiceovers, animation or cut-scenes featuring a rich variety of protagonists. Instead we had around 120 characters on a 'pager' at the top of the screen. This was years before Twitter too! Everything had to be scaled back and written for the maximum amount of information in the smallest amount of space."

But that wasn't the only problem he faced. "The missions could be played in pretty much any order within each city, so there was no real way of doing any sort of linear plot within a single city. Putting together little self-contained missions was a definite challenge. There was a lot of allusion and implied action taking place elsewhere, just to make the

writing reflect the 'living, breathing city' thing that the whole game embodied," muses Brian.

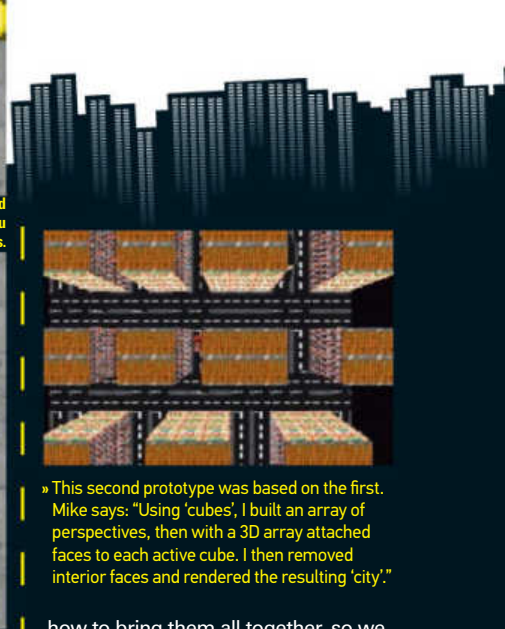
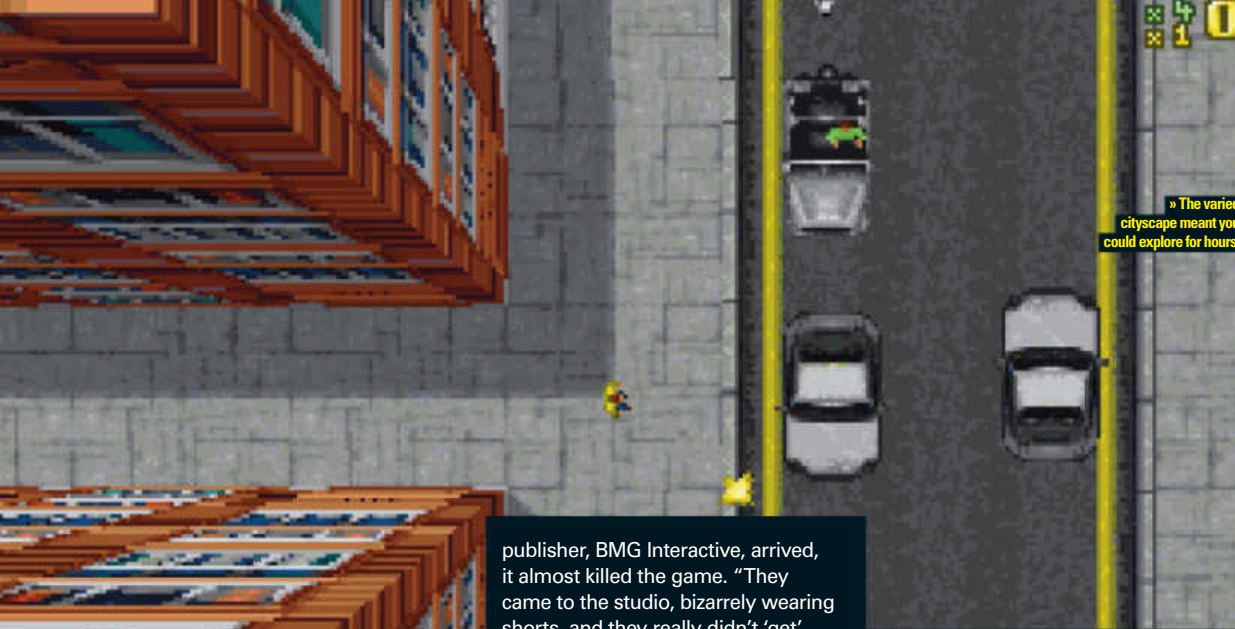
The non-linear mission system came later in the game's development. At first, the game had players returning to a sub-menu to select their next mission, but the level designers felt this broke the immersive nature of the game and that the front end was too boring. Coming up with the idea of spawning missions from payphones, characters, vehicles and other in-game elements was groundbreaking at the time, effectively building the level selection into the game itself, and it made a huge difference to the player's suspension of disbelief. "I don't think the code team were initially very pleased at this because they had never designed the engine to run indefinitely," says Paul. "The new mission structure certainly created a number of new issues for them to solve, but I'm glad they did."

The key to this was the level-scripting system. The programmers invented a language that the level designer could use to set up the

missions so that they would all be different. But although this brought great freshness to the game and the title was starting to come along at a cracking pace, with the 20-strong team working hard to perfect the gameplay, the whole project came close to cancellation on a few occasions. It was DMA's first game with a million-dollar budget and it was much bigger than anything the team had previously attempted, but when a group of high-ranking American executives from DMA's



» This early prototype of *Race 'N' Chase* was produced by Mike Dailly. He explains: "After the initial code was implemented in the game, *Syndicate Wars* appeared in a magazine. It was a little too close for our liking. On top of this, Keith [Hamilton] was also having some problems with his version of the engine, since he had to rewrite it in C and the speed wasn't holding."



» This second prototype was based on the first. Mike says: "Using 'cubes', I built an array of perspectives, then with a 3D array attached faces to each active cube. I then removed interior faces and rendered the resulting 'city'."

HITTING THE STREETS

THE *GTA* DEVELOPMENT team liked to muck in. They provided all of the game's voices, and there were also frequent rows. "The team was always arguing about something," laughs Paul. "There was a lot of positive friction on the team, but also some negative stuff from time to time." But it speaks volumes that many of them are still in touch with each other.

The sense of togetherness and fun meant they took risks, and this was evident early on. Usually a developer would put out a demo in order to attract the attention of a publisher. Not DMA Design. When it tried to get a publishing deal for *Grand Theft Auto*, it decided to shun the normal prototype material and get out on the streets of Dundee.

The team produced a live-action video, with a story of someone getting shot – played by lead programmer Keith Hamilton – and then a crazy car chase put together with some careful editing using a company car and an old banger that the team bought specially.

"There are shots of us driving along, hanging out the windows with guns and doing handbrake turns," says Keith. "This wasn't done on officially closed roads – just quiet industrial estates. Unfortunately, I don't have a copy, and I don't know if any copies still exist. I'd love to see one."



publisher, BMG Interactive, arrived, it almost killed the game. "They came to the studio, bizarrely wearing shorts, and they really didn't 'get' the game, with its outdated visuals, loads of bugs, and no clear genre," remembers Keith. "Fortunately, Dave Jones worked his magic and we were given a stay of execution."

GTA was released before Christmas and didn't appear that special on the face of it. It was brought to the table at a time when gamers were becoming used to playing in 3D and some reviewers reported drab, lifeless visuals and awkward driving dynamics. This, however, told only half a story. Here was an expansive, mould-breaking, free-form game with a compelling plot that also allowed for freedom and exploration. It had

rough port to the PlayStation devkit, which had much more memory than a retail machine. This allowed them to see it all working, albeit very slowly – less than a frame per second. "We then profiled the code to see where the slowdown was, and it was pretty much where we expected it to be: the rendering and the AI code," says Russell. "Over the next few months we optimised those areas while refining the control scheme. We had to completely rewrite the front end for the system, as the control mechanism and Sony's Technical Requirements Checklist were so different. It took quite a while to get right. We

Grand Theft Auto was a chance to run wild as the game car-jacked your mind and drove away with it

driving, shooting, chases and theft. It had all of the basic elements that have made the series so incredibly popular.

And while the missions lent purpose, the audio brought the city to life with its seven radio stations and police band track that boomed from car stereos and encouraged players to try different vehicles to see which tunes they got. There was a great sense that you were a criminal let loose on a metropolis, and you were not only up against other villains but the police too. It was a chance to run wild as the game car-jacked your mind and drove away with it.

A PlayStation version was essential, and it was created by Visual Science. Russell Kay had been the head PC programmer at DMA Design but left to form the new firm, which was located a short walk away. Visual Science worked with Psygnosis on several projects and so gained PlayStation experience, and when DMA realised that it couldn't deliver the PlayStation version in time, it called on Visual Science to assist.

The team consisted of four people, plus two programmers from DMA for a couple of months to help with some of the missions. They created a very

spent around eight months on the conversion overall."

The biggest problem was taking the PC version, which used around 16MB of RAM, and squeezing it into 2MB on the PlayStation. "The other challenge was the audio," admits Russell. "The rich PC audio had to be squeezed into the minuscule RAM of the PlayStation.

We used CD audio for the radio stations and made all of the other sound effects and police chatter as standard audio."

David Cowan was the lead engineer on the port. "I remember nothing on the PC version being documented very well. Most of the docs were very out of date, so the only references we had were the code and assets themselves," he says. "We didn't have access to the original assets either because they were spread all over the DMA network and no one knew

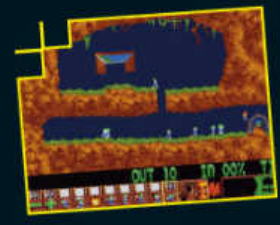
how to bring them all together, so we ended up writing a tool that read in the finalised PC retail packages and converted them back to individual sprites, sounds, levels and so on so we could convert them."

David remembers the code for the pedestrian system being horrendous, and he had to significantly modify it so that it wouldn't store the state of every pedestrian and car in the game. On the PlayStation, the state of each of these things was cached only for a short time and was randomly generated within 20 or 30 metres of the edge of the screen, which quartered the memory requirement. "Dead bodies disappeared after 30 seconds or so, and vehicles were randomly generated as you were driving or walking around. Skid marks on the PC version were also stored indefinitely but 'evaporated' on the PSone," says David.

GTA went down a storm on release, and it caused an inevitable wave of controversy. Politicians began to debate the game and there were calls for it to be banned. There was talk of videogame censorship. But Brian says the team didn't realise how contentious it would be.

"I think some of the team were a little shocked by the tabloid response,

questions in Parliament and getting the game on *Question Time*," he says. "But once everyone realised that this was just the way the media works, they all settled down a bit and started to enjoy it. After all, we'd made a game that gamers, critics and the people actually playing the game all thought was pretty bloody good. The controversy and hysteria was nothing compared to the satisfaction of having made a game that I think everyone involved can be justifiably proud of."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LEMMINGS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, PC, ST, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, LYNX
YEAR: 1991

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LONDON, 1969
SYSTEM: PC, PSONE
YEAR: 1999

GRAND THEFT AUTO 2
SYSTEM: PC, PSONE, DREAMCAST, GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 1999

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
SYSTEM: PS2, XBOX, PC
YEAR: 2001

BUSTED!



GTA'S ROADMAP TO SUCCESS

THE MAKING OF: GRAND THEFT AUTO



GTA: LONDON 1969

Year Released: 1999

After parodying New York, DMA Design turned its attention closer to home with London, and this time it visited the actual city. The end result is a game rife with cultural references that pay homage to everyone from the Kray twins to Sid Vicious and the Sex Pistols and James Bond. It featured over 30 new missions and introduced an additional 30 vehicles. Another mission pack, *Grand Theft Auto: London 1961*, was released two months later.



GTA 2

Year Released: 1999

DMA's sequel was business as usual, although it did introduce a number of new mechanics. The biggest difference was that you could now do missions for separate gangs, affecting your relationship with others, while the saving system was greatly improved, allowing you to save the game whenever you entered a church. The side missions that would become a staple were also introduced, letting the player take on jobs like a taxi or bus driver.



GTA III

Year Released: 2001

DMA Design returned to Liberty City for its first 3D *Grand Theft Auto*. The results were spectacular, further expanding the sandbox approach that had been hinted at in earlier games, while the likeable characters and well-plotted story gave it an epic scope that past titles simply couldn't match. You could argue that it was simply a better version of DMA's earlier *Body Harvest*, but *GTA III* was on a far larger scale, and all the more impressive for it.



GTA: VICE CITY

Year Released: 2002

In its new Rockstar North guise, the former DMA followed up its 2001 hit with the excellent *Vice City*. Set in a pastiche of Eighties Miami, it's a marvellous game and amazingly nostalgic due to the many film and cultural references packed into it. It's also loaded with recognisable voice talent, including Ray Liotta, Robert Davi, Danny Trejo, Tom Sizemore and Dennis Hopper. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is one of our favourite games in the entire franchise.



VICE CITY STORIES

Year Released: 2006

Vice City Stories is a similar retread for the PSP and is another prequel story. It's a far better game, though, thanks to a more interesting lead character, a better story and several new gameplay mechanics. The most interesting is empire building, which is a combination of *Vice City*'s properties and *San Andreas*' gang war systems. The multiplayer features additional modes, while load times are generally faster than its predecessor.



LIBERTY CITY STORIES

Year Released: 2005

Another *GTA* game set in Liberty City. Released for the PSP and later ported to the PS2, it's another prequel to *Grand Theft Auto III*, but feels cut down after the epic scope of *San Andreas*. While it's now possible to ride a motorcycle, your character can't swim or climb. It's a lot smaller than *San Andreas* as well. It's still an enjoyable addition to the franchise and far better structured than *GTA Advance*, but it doesn't feel like it's bringing anything new to the series.



GTA: SAN ANDREAS

Year Released: 2004

Everything about *San Andreas* is epic. It's huge, featuring parodies of San Francisco, Las Vegas and Los Angeles. It has a great plot and enjoyable characters. The voice cast is also brilliant, with turns from Samuel L. Jackson, Ice T, James Woods and Peter Fonda. It's the scale that most impresses, though, with clever RPG mechanics, numerous new activities, burglary, car modification and huge gang wars all adding to the appeal. Quite easily *GTA*'s finest hour.



GTA ADVANCE

Year Released: 2004

GTA Advance was an attempt to cram the winning formula into a handheld. Sadly, it was a pretty disappointing effort that wasn't able to re-create the same magic that made the original games so enjoyable to play. Created by Digital Eclipse, making it the first *GTA* game not handled by Rockstar, its events take place a year before those of *GTA III*. While it once again takes place in Liberty City, many of the locations for popular secrets have been changed.



GTA IV

Year Released: 2008

We were disappointed with *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Yes, it featured a strong story and interesting characters, but it felt lacking somehow – especially after *San Andreas* – as if the technology wasn't completely ready for Rockstar's vision. Fortunately, things picked up significantly with two digital add-ons, *The Lost And Damned* and *The Ballad Of Gay Tony* (later released together as *Episodes From Liberty City*), which added a lot of fun elements that hadn't made it into the original.



GTA: CHINATOWN WARS

Year Released: 2009

First released on Nintendo's DS and developed by Rockstar Leeds, *Chinatown Wars* remains the best handheld *GTA*. Sporting a new viewpoint, crisp visuals and great use of the DS's touch screen, it's a fantastic game that implements many of the mechanics of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. By far the best part of the game, though, is its drug-dealing mini-game, which allows for an insane amount of strategy as you go about, dealing to the scum of the city.

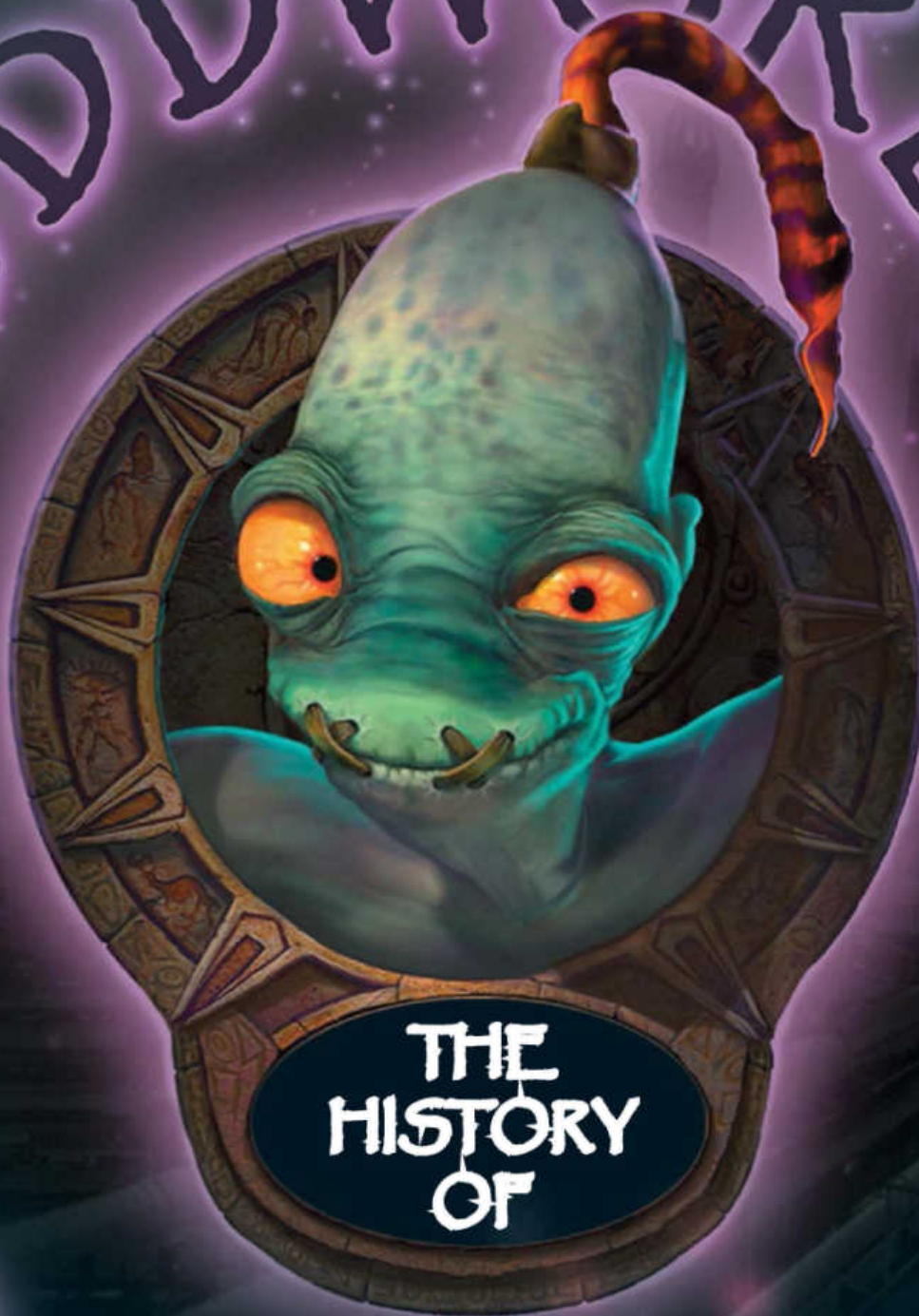


GTA V

Year Released: 2013

Rockstar promised that *Grand Theft Auto V* would be "the largest and the most ambitious game Rockstar has yet created", and a "radical reinvention of the *Grand Theft Auto* universe". It wasn't wrong. While the controls still feel clunky, the actual game world is incredibly immersive and really pushes both the PS3 and Xbox 360 to their limits. Our advice is to pick up the stunning next gen ports or the recently released PC version.

ODDWORLD



With a HD remake recently released, David Crookes talks to Lorne Lanning about the impact of Abe's Oddysee and the rest of a series that just fell short of its planned quintology

A character who can break wind is always a winner. Even if that character is an alien with bulbous, bloodshot eyes, a high ponytail of hair made from feathers and a skinny, almost malnourished torso; the ability to let one go, while undoubtedly disgusting, is yet all too endearing to ignore.

It may not be a tool employed by many other gaming characters, but perhaps Sonic, Mario and even Lara could give it a go. Then again, they have not quite endured the life of Abe, star of the *Oddworld* games, whose backstory would make noises emit from all but the toughest of bottoms.

Abe's days are spent scrubbing floors and suffering heartless beatings from Sligs, the backbone of a repressive society's industrial security team. Things take a rather sinister turn when Abe accidentally discovers that he and his fellow Mudokon workers are not merely slaves, but fodder for the machines used at the vast Rupture Farms food processing plant where they toil each day.

Lucky then that Abe emerges as the 'chosen one' and is able to pursue the ousting of dictator Mulluck the Glukkon and his evil regime, thereby freeing the downtrodden from their horrific plight.

Today, such determination to stick one to 'The Man' and spark an uprising would undoubtedly involve Twitter. Technology-free Abe treads a rather more conventional path, stomping around on foot, meeting other slaves in person and cheerily urging them to "follow me" – but not too closely, you would hope.

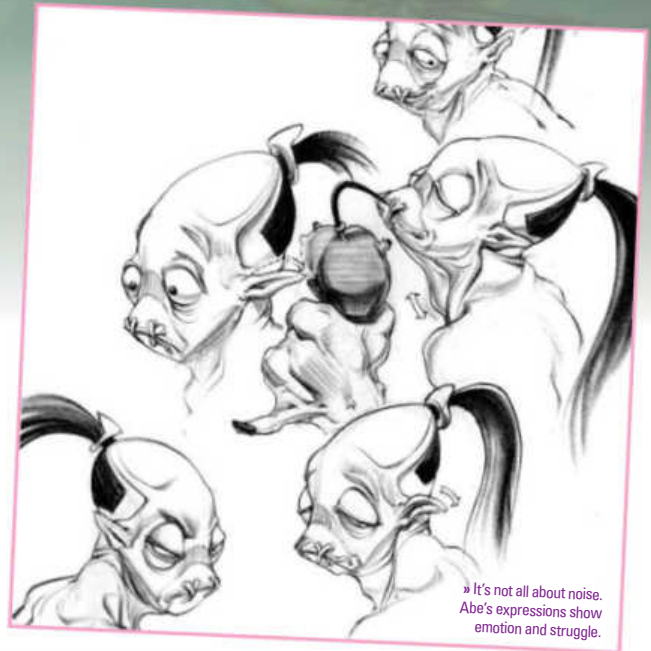
"From a story perspective, all of the *Oddworld* stories were inspired from the dirty deeds of the dark side of globalisation," explains Lorne Lanning, who co-founded American developer Oddworld Inhabitants with fellow special effects and computer animation expert Sherry McKenna. "And it was the stories that convinced Sherry to get involved and do this whole thing with me."

Work began on the plot in January 1995. "We took big inspiration from *Flashback*, *Out Of This World* and *Myst*, and it worked well," Lorne continues. "We started to create an intriguing world." Ideas were bounced off designer Paul O'Connor and the crew to work out what would work and what could be altered should production hit any issues.

Originally, the idea was to call the game *SoulStorm*, but other games at the time had the word 'Soul' in them so a new moniker was found to avoid confusion. There were also initial thoughts over making the game 3D, but this was scrapped in favour of 2D, even though the advent of the 32-bit consoles showed a market going the other way.

The game drew on the gaming styles of old – right down to an 8-bit flick-screen mechanic – and that was due to Lorne's belief that there was still mileage left in 2D gaming. Lorne had also been working with 3D for the previous decade and didn't believe the crop of 3D games on the PlayStation were outstanding enough to prompt a switch.

Still, the assets were built in 3D. The bitmaps for the game were pre-rendered and this, in a sense, produced rich 2.5D with



» Lorne Lanning is the driving force behind *Oddworld*.

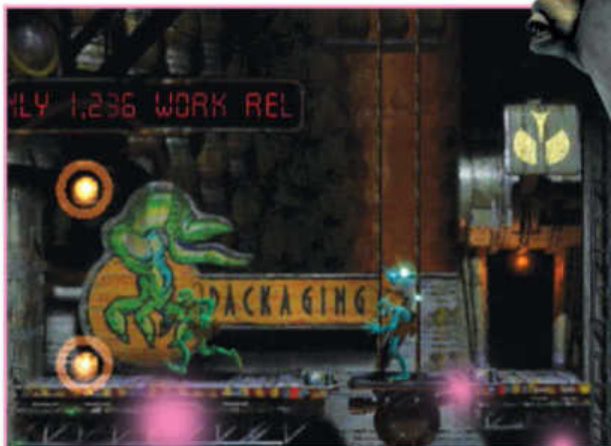
image depth and detail. "We didn't want to launch 'low poly world' to establish the first impression of the *Oddworld* Universe," Lorne says, revealing that the plan to build a five-part story – *The Oddworld Quintology* – was foremost in his mind.

As well as beautiful visuals and slick cut-scenes that blended into the gameplay, a major part of *Oddworld* was the feature Gamespeak. It allowed Abe to talk, whistle and, yes, fart, and it was crucial for gameplay and for humour. Seldom failing to raise a smile, it was seen as so important that it was included in the demo Lorne hawked around to publishers to whip up interest and investment in the game.

The debut title also had an artificial intelligence routine called *Aware Lifeforms In Virtual Environments* (or *ALIVE* for short). This

controlled the actions of the game's creatures according to the situation they were faced with and the type of character they were. Abe could therefore decide to solve some puzzles and ignore others, and the player could even trick Sligs into shooting each other.

Abe could also chant and possess other characters, using them to solve puzzles or carry out a killing. Although Lorne wanted shooting in the game he didn't want Abe to have a twitchy trigger finger himself, and this was a way around such a situation (keen watchers will also note, incidentally, that Abe had four fingers in the debut game but only three thereafter – this was to avoid causing offence in Japan where four-fingered characters are banned out of respect for meat-packing workers who often lost fingers in work-related accidents). *Abe's Oddysee* progressed well and was earmarked for a PlayStation and PC release. ►



» Abe will often have to use others in order to progress.



FANTASTIC VOYAGE 1982

■ Zooming through the body of a brain-damaged scientist, this game was inspired by the Sixties movie of the same name. Items of note included a lung, yellow cholesterol and other such inside-of-body organs and happenings.



ANT ATTACK 1983

■ The walled city of Anteschur was inhabited by giant ants which would be annihilated by lobbing grenades. Gamers could play as a man or woman and try and rescue hostages. A B-movie of a game.



ANOTHER WORLD 1991

■ Young scientist Lester explores a treacherous alien world with dangerous indigenous animals and humanoid creatures. Cinematic, and with use of the rotoscoping animation technique, players loved the enormous fictional universe.



BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL 1992

■ Talking pigs? Tick. Or rather, raise eyebrows. A commercial failure it may have been, but the planet Hyllis was under siege and freelance hack Jade was just the sort to go head-to-head with the alien race, Domz.



HEART OF DARKNESS 1998

■ The Darklands was a foreboding place with winged shadow creatures and monsters. Controlled by the Master of Darkness, you didn't always want to avoid death given the deliciously explicit meet-the-maker scenes you'd witness.



THE LONGEST JOURNEY 1999

■ Set in a parallel universe, this point-and-click adventure game saw April Ryan shifting between Arcadia and Industrial Stark and all of the various hazards that were present in each of them.

» Early artwork – this from 26 April 1995 – shows the thinking behind the strange nature of the world Abe inhabits.



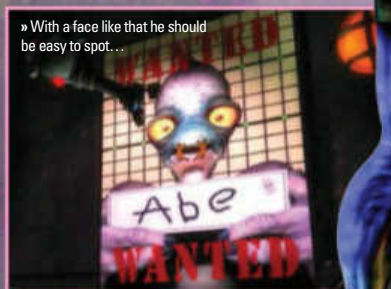
► Abe's *Oddyssey* was a huge success and it sold well in the lead up to Christmas, prompting a Game Boy version called *Oddworld Adventures* to be released in 1998. If there was a complaint, it was the lack of a quick-save facility – "It was maddening that we delivered without getting it in the first time," muses Lorne. "Chalk it up to lessons learned." – but the team made sure it was implemented in the sequel.

"We had just nine months to release Abe's *Exoddus* for Christmas following *Oddyssey*'s release," recalls Lorne. "It was a super crunch all the way through the entire development, and this was less than half the time that Abe's *Oddyssey* took us to develop. But it was more complicated as we also believed we needed 'twice the game' in sheer poundage."

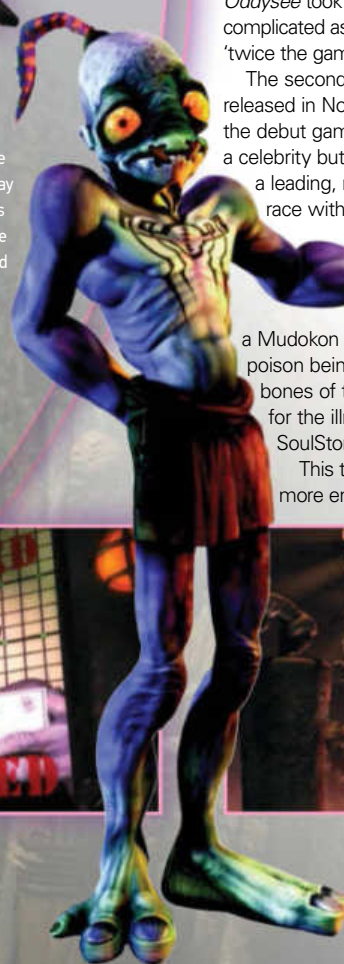
The second game in the series, which was released in November 1998, picked up where the debut game left off. Abe had become a celebrity but was told that the Glukkons, a leading, ruthless, capitalist, industrial race with a disregard for worker rights, was grabbing blind Mudokons and enslaving them to excavate site. With a a Mudokon burial poison being created from the bones of the dead, Abe had to find a cure for the illness and prevent the creation of SoulStorm's brew.

This time out, the characters became more emotionally engaging and the

» With a face like that he should be easy to spot...



» You'll often move to the background during play.



THE HISTORY OF ODDWORLD



pace picked up. Gamespeak instructions were used to command multiple Mudokons at the same time, and Mudokons found it harder to follow Abe because many of them were blind. For Lanning, it was about giving the game a further level of polish, depth and challenge.

"Our approach to the game was pretty much compatible with how you would approach a film," says Lorne. "With both you start with a script, but we then used an additional layer of game mechanics that we knew we wanted to implement or evolve upon."

"So starting with these two key high-level components we worked them up simultaneously. We integrated the script tightly against the ramping of mechanics in gameplay. Our target was continually working to try to find a tighter fusion of narrative that was not only engaging as a story, but was also informative and foreshadowing of new play mechanics that would be coming up next for the gamer."

The first game had a heads-up display, but this was dropped for the sequel. "It was a goal of mine to try to eliminate any menu elements that broke the reality horizon," Lorne explains. "Floating GUI elements reinforce for you 'this is a game' and for the original Abe games we wanted to get away from that impression and instead try to instil the sensation of the player being responsible for these people living in this world."

In trying to remove all traces of the traditional heads-up display, Oddworld Inhabitants attempted to find more clever, subtle methods of communicating necessary information, and tried to do it in more logical ways so that it felt more like a film. "We wanted the elements to feel like they were within the world rather than a HUD layered over the world," Lorne continues. "It was attempting to accomplish a deeper impression of a 'living creature adventure', rather than just a 'gaming adventure'."

The emotions helped bring the creatures to life. "The second game had more entertainment value as well as a stronger emotional relationship to these silly little characters," says Lorne. "We always want you to laugh when you're playing our games, regardless of how dark their subject matter is."

And dark is a good description. Much of that is down to Lorne himself. He is a deep thinker who, with the *Oddworld* series of games, was aiming to craft a gameplay and story experience that drew on a sense of injustice. Festering in the back of Lorne's mind was a concern for disturbing human rights abuses by powerful corporations from the shipping docks of Bangladesh to the diamond or gold mines in South America and South Africa. He wanted *Oddworld* to have a dark premise but



» Cut-scenes did a great job of conveying Abe's weird and wacky personality.

follow the lead set by *The Simpsons* and *The Daily Show*, both of which refrain from getting up on a soap box. Like them, he did not want to lose sight of *Oddworld* as entertainment and believed that humour and narrative would combine to raise important issues.

He denies that the series is political. "Personally, I think politics is for chumps," he says. "It's for suckers who still believe they have people fighting for their interests in the greater halls of power and often willingly refuse to see that their would be heroes have been completely compromised." But he talks of an "insane elite class of globalists actively ruining the planet for the rest of us and for their own short-term power gains".

"It was always these practises that inspired the content of *Oddworld*, as these stories started taking shape 20 years ago," Lorne

» Abe's world is a seriously oppressive one. Poor Abe.



ODD ADVENTURES

Your guide to Abe and co's numerous retail releases



ABE'S ODDYSEE

DEVELOPER:
ODD WORLD
INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT
INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS:
PLAYSTATION,
WINDOWS
YEAR: 1997



ABE'S EXODDUS

DEVELOPER:
ODD WORLD
INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT
INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS:
PLAYSTATION,
WINDOWS
YEAR: 1998



ODD WORLD ADVENTURES

DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM:
GAME BOY
YEAR: 1998



ODD WORLD ADVENTURES 2

DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM:
GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 2000



MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

DEVELOPER:
ODD WORLD
INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER:
MICROSOFT GAME
STUDIOS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2001



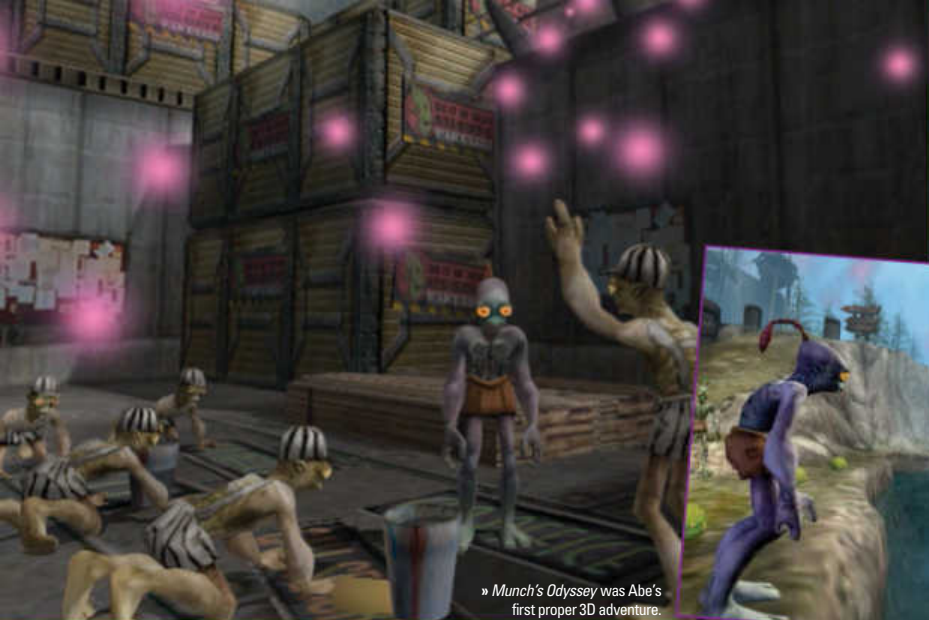
MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

DEVELOPER: ART CO
PUBLISHER: THQ INC
PLATFORM:
GAME BOY ADVANCE
YEAR: 2001



STRANGER'S WRATH

DEVELOPER:
ODD WORLD
INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER:
ELECTRONIC ARTS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2005



» Munch's Oddysee was Abe's first proper 3D adventure.



» Munch was the main protagonist of the third game.

► continues. "So for me, I look deep into the darkest practises of the kleptoclass in a constant search of vehicles to inspire fiction from these practises in an effort to transform that darkness into a launch point for some seriously relevant and deeply ironic modern myth humour."

Lorne's outlook had an effect on the types of enemies in the game that were always designed around how they would play. The Glukkons were inspired by the kleptoclass. "Big shots bossing people around while ultimately being pretty useless parasites. Like bankers," he says. New enemies were also introduced including Flying Sligs, Slugs, Mine Cars and Greeters. "They were all first designed as challenges within our code reach, then we interpreted the mechanics into themed characters," Lorne says.

Following yet further acclaim, Lorne and his team pushed on with the third of the planned five games. The loyalty to PlayStation had gone and *Munch's Oddysee* was being slated for an exclusive November 2001 release on the Xbox.

As with the other games, there were two endings. "We did this because we always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game, but if you played the game without empathy, we wanted you to get an ending that reflected your personal character," says Lorne. "If you went through our journey as a heartless douche, we wanted to remind you what a schmuck you were being and how it would ruin the fate of those you were supposed to be helping."

But this instalment was the first time *Oddworld* was rendered in three dimensions. "At the time, everyone was enamoured with 3D and the gaming press was speaking of 3D as the only viable way," Lorne recalls. "It was sad to see all the genres being left behind because they weren't using new chipsets. Regardless, if you wanted to keep getting funded, you needed to stay with the chipsets and where the audience interests were heading, and by the time we got to the Xbox it was all about 3D otherwise you probably weren't getting funded."

The added dimension was a challenge to capture what made Abe special in his awkwardness and abilities, yet have that embedded in a free roaming space. There was

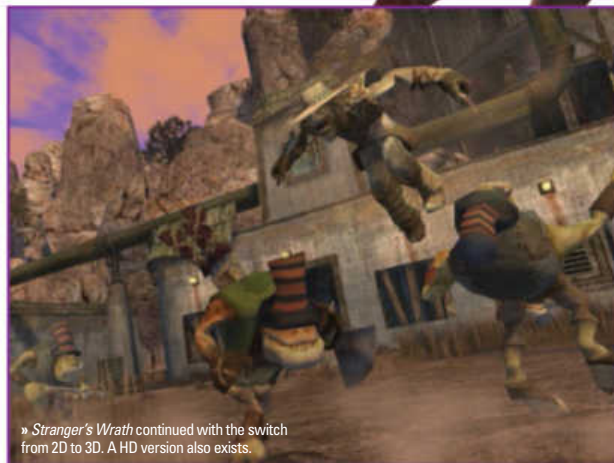
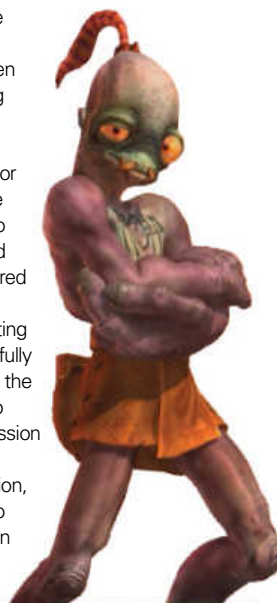
“We always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game”

Lorne Lanning

also a huge real-time 3D learning curve that all of the team was going through. But they made the most of the situation and, with players not only playing Abe but Munch too, the game could enter fresh waters.

"We needed the ability to swap between characters while also dealing with targeting in possession," says Lorne. "In the *Abe* games, they were 2D and so possession was proximity auto-targeting. It was easy for the user to understand who they would be possessing. Once we entered 3D, the auto nature of it needed to change as depth and dimension added new dynamics and required new accuracies to offer the player."

He said it was a case of the player wanting to possess "that Slig over there, not; hopefully that one over there but we'll see what Slig the game chooses for us. That wasn't going to work," he explains, "so we needed possession to be targetable and, being in a 3D world, targeting was as easy as character navigation, so we used the same navigation abilities to control your possession orb. You could then navigate to nail your target."



» *Stranger's Wrath* continued with the switch from 2D to 3D. A HD version also exists.

The reviews were not as favourable for *Munch's Oddysee*, with some believing the puzzles lacked variation. Lorne has no complaints.

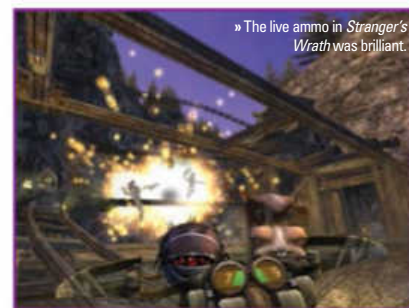
"I always felt all of our puzzles were not varied enough, but these are challenges with puzzle games and the amount of code we were writing for each puzzle," he confesses. "Puzzle games are not very economical with code. Combine that with development environments that were unpredictable in terms of budgeting, and you found yourself in tight spots making lots of compromises."

The fourth game, *Stranger's Wrath*, however, was a superb return to form. Released in January 2005 in America, it was critically acclaimed. It had first and third-person perspectives and was also faster. The team wanted speed to be a factor in the third-person in particular, due to the character's nature and ability to run faster. Stranger could become a ramming melee fighter at higher speeds and, by increasing in speed, his motion ability morphed into a motorcycle mode. He didn't, as Lorne explains, "pivot on a dime with speed". He steered and leaned into turns and it allowed for him to run much faster and feel more like a vehicle when controlled.

"This allowed us to have more 'retreat for higher ground' ability if you were getting overwhelmed in a combat situation," says Lorne. "Now you could retreat, and with enough speed to get past getting shot in the back – something I felt was very much missing out there for character-driven combat games."

Stranger's Wrath had an element of stealth, too. It remained true to the character's nature but also compounded the chemistry of choices that players were able to have at their disposal. It offered the gamer more choices in how to solve any combat situation. But another decision was made: *Stranger's Wrath* contained role-playing elements.

"Action-adventure games seemed inevitably heading toward a role-playing model, at least at an accounting level," says Lorne. "If the game was going to have a persistent economy, and one that your character needed to pursue in the narrative, then it needed to incorporate more modification and purchasability for the main character. Having this inherent in a system gives you many more things that you can make the gamer do for various reasons at



» The live ammo in *Stranger's Wrath* was brilliant.

THE NEW KEEPER OF ODDWORLD

Five years after *Stranger's Wrath*, the series was given a dust down by developer Just Add Water. We talk to founder and CEO Stewart Gilray about the HD remakes



You began working on the *Oddworld* franchise in May 2010. Were you a fan of the series and how did you get involved?

I'd met Lorne briefly at GDC 2009. He was one of my industry icon legends and someone I'd always wanted to meet. Over the years I'd been asking a mutual friend to persuade Lorne to go back to doing a 2D-type game but with 3D assets – a remake of *Abe's Oddysee* or a game of a similar nature – but in June 2009, Lorne and I started exchanging emails. We spent the next nine months talking about various things and then he asked if Just Add Water could help them out as they'd been let down by another developer. He wanted us to look at *Stranger's Wrath* for the PC and I said yes, as long as we could do a PS3 version. We began to work on *Stranger HD* for PS3 in late September

2009 while still working on the initial PC release of *Stranger*, which was a straight port from Xbox.

By the time of your involvement, the series had been stagnant for four years. Were there discussions about moving the series on?

There were no real discussions. It was a case of 'let's do this project, and see where it leads to', and we've now released the initial PC release of *Stranger's Wrath HD*, two versions of *Munch's Oddysee HD* and we're working on the multi-platform remake of *Abe's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. We only had two staff when we began the initial version but we have 16 now. The plan is we will continue and work on some proper new projects. We're going through a re-structure at the moment that will help that become a reality.

There were promises of *SligStorm*, *Fangus Klot*, *Squeek's Oddysee* and some other games. What was happening and why were these games not getting off the ground?

When the original studio

was closed in April 2005, it was because Lorne and Sherry McKenna had decided enough was enough working with publishers. The primary reason was the difficulty of working on a triple-A title with budgets north of \$15m, especially if you're only seeing a small return rate due to publisher/developer agreements the way they were back then. *Fangus Klot* was in development when that happened, so that was the main victim of what happened then. Lorne had been working on the story and design for *Squeek's Oddysee* as well, but couldn't solve a problem he had with it so it kept getting put on the back burner until that thing was solved. And *SligStorm* just didn't happen mainly due to working on *Munch's Oddysee*.

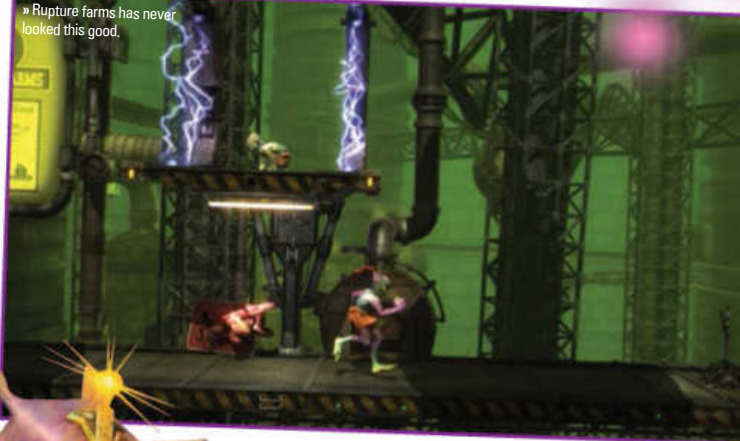
What makes *Oddworld* such a special series of games?

This is pretty easy actually: character, story, the world, craziness but most importantly the humour.

Is there still a place for 2D gaming in the modern era?

Why not? I think both pure 2D art and 3D art with 2D gameplay can still work very well, and we're showing that with *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. I think this need for everything to be in 3D isn't always the right thing to do; there are better solutions if the design requires it.

» Rapture farms has never looked this good.



various times, all of which are added tools available to the designers that help overall ramping while helping to decrease a potential monotony that can come with a game."

The fourth game became the last *Oddworld* title and the fifth game did not appear, cutting short the original quintology. *Stranger's Wrath* had been published by Electronic Arts and, while Lorne doesn't go too deep, he says, "Our experience working with the last publisher pretty much annihilated any desire we might have had left in continuing to work with big publishers," which points to a potential issue.

Plans for other games came and went. Names such as *Oddworld: The Hand Of Odd*, *SligStorm*, *The Brutal Ballad Of Fangus Klot*, *Oddworld: Squeek's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: Munch's Exoddus* and *Oddworld: Slave Circus* were put forward over the years. And while a game may well have surfaced around 2008, the Western financial crisis and work on a new project called *Citizen Siege* caused a distraction.

Remakes and digital content appear to be the way forward for now, and the *Oddworld* franchise is being built organically and without financing. But it means that the team cannot spend in the way it did, and it will take a while before triple-A contemporary content is released. "We've talked about a number of games but that was probably a mistake," says Lorne. "It's something I won't be doing until I know they are paid for."

It seems the appetite is still there, however. "We're very grateful for the way things have worked out but, like a lot of artists, we're always wanting to do better," he says, and we pray to hear Abe's farts in a new game sooner rather than later.

» Just Add Water has put a lot of care and attention into its HD remake.



» New 'N' Tasty was a great HD update.



The 20 Greatest PlayStation Games

YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



Though it was a hugely successful machine, there's more to the PlayStation than million-selling mega hits. Nick Thorpe leads the expedition to unearth some hidden gems...

Rapid Reload

■ DEVELOPER: MEDIA VISION ■ YEAR: 1995 ■ GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 This run-and-gunner made an appearance at the PlayStation's European launch, but it was passed over by a public hungry for the 3D games that were still a huge novelty at the time and that's a real shame. Though its visuals were only slightly enhanced over the capabilities of the SNES, the game itself was a riot. Developers Media Vision were very clearly influenced by Treasure's *Gunstar Heroes* (a fact evident in the original Japanese title *Gunner's Heaven*), and while it's not quite as good as the Mega Drive classic, it packs much of the same appeal with loads of on-screen carnage and some impressive weaponry. PAL copies are scarce, but it shouldn't be too hard to track down the Japanese version.



"Kurushi is a tricky puzzler, with an oppressive atmosphere thanks to its dark aesthetic"



Pepsiman

■ DEVELOPER: KID ■ YEAR: 1998 ■ GENRE: PLATFORMER

18 Many years before the likes of *Temple Run* popularised the runner sub-genre on mobile phones, Japanese gamers got to experience the genre as a soft drink tie-in. *Pepsiman* sees our near-mute hero sprinting from destination to destination in order to ensure that people get their Pepsi. Thankfully, the game frequently throws up ridiculous situations in order to keep the action fresh – our hero can be found running while stuck inside a bin, or being chased by a giant can of Pepsi. Despite being a Japanese game the voice acting is all in English, so this is a remarkably import-friendly release – but it's tough enough to be unfriendly to players.

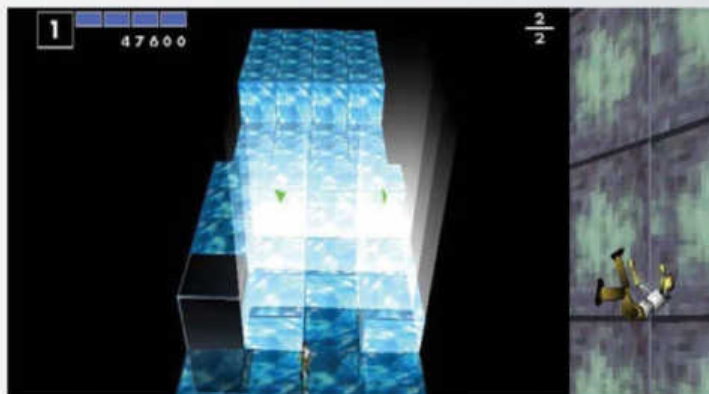


Kurushi

■ DEVELOPER: G-ARTISTS

■ YEAR: 1997 ■ GENRE: PUZZLE

19 *Kurushi* enjoyed a relatively high profile due to its placement on demo discs, but very few people actually appear to have picked it up. Set on a platform of floating blocks, you play as a man whose goal is to survive by clearing waves of massive blocks rolling towards him, while avoiding the black penalty blocks. Failure to do so correctly will result in the platform shortening, giving less room to tackle the oncoming waves. It's a tricky puzzler, which boasts an oppressive atmosphere thanks to its stark aesthetic – it's just you, the blocks and the endless darkness that waits below. There's also a sequel available titled *Kurushi Final*, which adds extra game modes for the most hardcore players.



Tombi!

■ DEVELOPER: WHOOPEE CAMP ■ YEAR: 1997 ■ GENRE: PLATFORM

17 The Koma Pigs have stolen a bracelet from Tombi's grandfather, and that's something he just won't stand for. As a result, our pink-haired protagonist sets out on a quest to retrieve it, while leaping on pigs and chucking them about the place. It's all rather uncivilised, but he is a caveman after all. This adventure platformer isn't divided into stages, but calls to mind the formula of the later *Wonder Boy* games as it takes place as one long quest, in which, you'll always be pursuing multiple goals at the same time.

The high quality of Tombi's first adventure didn't ensure sales success, and the game was overlooked upon release, being seen as outdated due to its 2D gameplay. A sequel with fully 3D visuals was released later on, but it too failed to find a great deal of success and Whoopee Camp disbanded shortly afterwards. As a result, both *Tombi!* and its sequel are rare and expensive games, with the original typically changing hands for £50 or more.





World's Scariest Police Chases

■ DEVELOPER: UDS ■ YEAR: 2001 ■ GENRE: DRIVING

16 Though the launch of the PlayStation 2 in 2000 drew a lot of attention away from its older sibling, the PlayStation still had plenty left to offer players that stuck around through its later years. This excellent and oft-overlooked licensed driving game is testament to that – it plays a lot like *Driver*, but with the player cast more definitely on the good side of the law. Chasing down criminals and ramming them off the road is the order of the day and if they're particularly hard targets, you'll be authorised to use firearms to assist in their capture. John Bunnell, the host of the TV series, provides the voiceover work for each mission in the dramatic tone that has made him famous. It's easy to pre-emptively dismiss the game thanks to its licence, but give it a go – you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Incredible Crisis

■ DEVELOPER: POLYGON MAGIC
■ YEAR: 1999 ■ GENRE: PARTY

14 You might have had a bad day at work, but nothing like what poor Taneo has to deal with. Things start going wrong when a massive globe begins to crash through his office, and quickly escalate to plummeting elevators, shocking quizzes from paramedics and more. What's more, this mini-game collection succeeds primarily because it's a lot of fun and packs in a good amount of content – 24 mini-games should provide plenty of variety. However, *Incredible Crisis* also achieves the rare feat of being an intentionally funny videogame thanks to some strong visual gags. The game surprisingly managed to receive a worldwide release, so you shouldn't run into much trouble trying to acquire it.



Suzuki Bakuatsu

■ DEVELOPER: SOL ■ YEAR: 2000 ■ GENRE: PUZZLE



15 Sometimes, it's hard to be a woman in Japan. You wake up, thinking it's going to be a relatively normal day, and then you try to eat an orange – but it turns out that the orange is a bomb. Luckily, our protagonist just happens to be the daughter of a bomb disposal expert, which is a good job because she runs into disguised explosive devices *all the time*. Yes, it's another odd game in which heavily stylised cutscenes meet bizarre objectives, as our protagonist has to defuse devices concealed as guns and even the moon.

The actual gameplay involves deactivating bombs by carefully removing screws and cutting wires. Devices gradually become more complex, and certain moves will make others inaccessible so you have to consider your options, while also being mindful of the game's time limit. Further complicating matters, you'll often come up against dead ends and traps, meaning that one wrong move can see you rest in pieces. As you might have guessed, *Suzuki Bakuatsu* is an import game. The screen text is all in Japanese but the game is generally intuitive enough to be playable without knowledge of the language.



"There's a lot of depth to Devil Dice. The main puzzle mechanics are well constructed and the puzzle mode delivers lots of challenging problems"

Tobal 2

■ DEVELOPER: DREAMFACTORY
■ YEAR: 1997 ■ GENRE: FIGHTING

13 While its predecessor gained a worldwide release, *Tobal 2* was unfortunately confined to Japan. That means that most gamers haven't experienced one of the most interesting fighting games of the 32-bit era, which features some interesting innovations from *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* director Seiji Ishii. Chief amongst these is a complex grapple system, which is unmatched in most one-on-one fighters due to the increased prominence of clinch strikes and transitions more common in pro wrestling and MMA games. Another factor setting the game apart is its RPG-style quest mode, a huge addition to the game, which grants access to dozens of unlockable fighters. All of this is represented with high-resolution visuals at 60 frames per second, which show off Akira Toriyama's outlandish character designs. There will never be another fighter like it, so be sure to give it a try.





Vagrant Story

■ DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
■ YEAR: 2000 ■ GENRE: ACTION-RPG

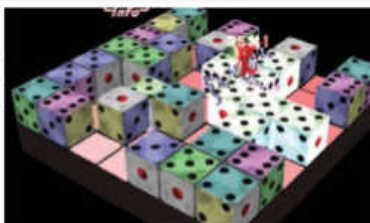
12 *Vagrant Story* is an odd one – it received overwhelmingly positive reviews upon release, but never achieved the fame of Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy* series. The later years of the PlayStation's life saw a trend for cinematic storytelling in videogames develop, and *Vagrant Story* excels at this. However, it's actually a decidedly old-school game – you won't find any tedious "Find The NPC" quests or dull shopping here, just action and adventure. The adventuring elements of the game call to mind classic isometric adventures such as *Landstalker*, while the in-depth combat allows targeting of individual limbs, allowing you to strategically disable your enemies.

Devil Dice

■ DEVELOPER: SHIFT
■ YEAR: 1998 ■ GENRE: PUZZLE

11 We're prone to describing puzzle games as devilishly challenging, and this one doesn't even attempt to hide its satanic allegiances. This is a block-matching puzzler, in which the goal is to match faces on six-sided dice by running them around the grid. While you're on top of the dice, each step rolls them over – when you're on the floor with them, they'll slide around on the bottom face instead of rotating. Each face needs to be matched with the appropriate number of its counterparts – twos are easy to clear but sixes are much harder. However, higher numbers bring higher rewards.

There's a lot of depth to *Devil Dice*. The main puzzle mechanics are well constructed and the puzzle mode delivers lots of challenging pre-set problems featuring variant rule sets, such as different floors and immovable metal blocks. If you enjoy it, there's an even more obscure PS2 sequel called *Bombastic*.



Power Diggerz

■ DEVELOPER: TAITO ■ YEAR: 2000 ■ GENRE: PARTY

10 No, we haven't got the genre wrong – in a just world, *Power Diggerz* would be remembered as one of the best mini-game collections ever to hit the market. The game sees you placed in charge of some heavy-duty construction equipment, performing tasks like scooping sand, tearing down buildings and clearing paths blocked by volcanic rocks. However, the serious stuff isn't the reason why *Power Diggerz* is so appealing – the real joy lies in the mini-games, in which you perform bizarre tasks like scooping turtles from a swimming pool and serving curry onto giant plates. If you can think of a bizarre way to utilise a power shovel, it's probably in this game.

The game is put together fantastically well, and offers the multiplayer mode required to become a proper party classic. Unfortunately, there is one particular flaw that keeps it from reaching its full potential – the control system. While intuitive and responsive it uses every button on the pad and thus requires players to spend some time learning to play properly. It's clearly been done for the love of heavy machinery, which the game exhibits in spades – all the vehicles are licensed Komatsu models. You certainly can't accuse Taito of failing to make the most of the game's subject matter.

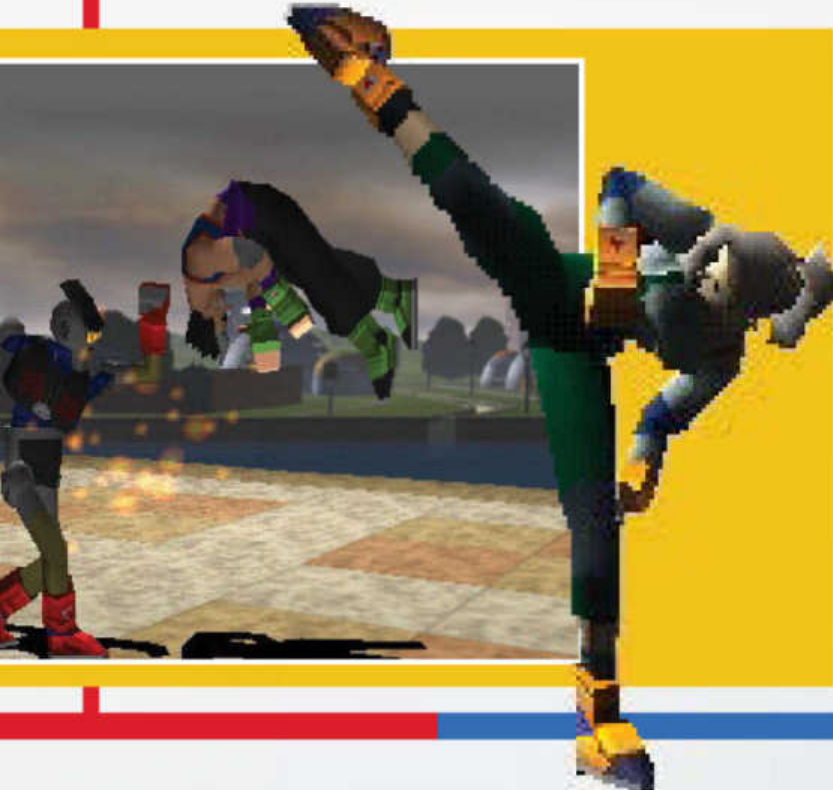
Power Diggerz seemed to have everything going for it upon release – it went down well with the press, earning scores as high as 92% in Play, and hit the shelves at a budget price. It's even got the universal sign of high quality: an intentionally misspelled title which uses Z to pluralise a word. Unfortunately, by the time the game made the journey to international audiences in 2001, much of the gaming market had already moved on to newer consoles. Go back and pick up a copy, because you'll really *dig* it.



Aquanaut's Holiday

■ DEVELOPER: ARTDINK
■ YEAR: 1995 ■ GENRE: SIMULATION

9 ArtDink was **unafraid** to experiment with Sony's console, leading to this undersea exploration game. Much of the action involves simply exploring the ocean, searching for fish, crabs and the like as well as occasionally finding unusual landmarks, such as ruins of sunken cities. As you explore, you gain more resources in order to build an artificial reef to attract marine life, with the ultimate goal being to gather as much stuff as possible in one area. It's a very slow-paced game with little in the way of traditional structure, but the experience is worthwhile – there really isn't much like this on any console, and it serves to highlight the diverse range of software available on the PlayStation.





Vib Ribbon

■ DEVELOPER: NANA ON-SHA
■ YEAR: 2000 ■ GENRE: RHYTHM ACTION

8 While it's likely that you've heard of *Vib Ribbon* thanks to demo discs and the cult classic status it has attained, far fewer of you are likely to have played it – particularly readers in North America, who didn't receive the game the first time around. Your goal is to guide the rabbit Vibri over obstacles in time to music, as she skips merrily down the line (a literal line, as this is a black and white wireframe game). That's standard fare for the rhythm action genre, but what sets *Vib Ribbon* apart is the option to generate stages from your own CDs. Much of the fun comes from simply seeing how the game reacts to your musical tastes – fans of speed metal and hardcore techno be warned, your CD collection might just cause blistered thumbs.

Sanvein

■ DEVELOPER: SUCCESS
■ YEAR: 2000 ■ GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

7 This kind of shoot-'em-up wasn't the most popular type of game on the market by the time it reached the West, and it was pushed out by budget publishers as a result. While the game offers a decent weapon choices, *Sanvein's* stark blue aesthetic and simplistic arena shooting might feel off-putting, as it's quite easy to bumble along for a while and eventually die without ever quite knowing why. However, spending some time with the game reveals its hidden depths.

The trick is that each stage is only meant to last for a very brief time – get in, blow things up, then get back to the hexagonal stage map. It's an important feature of the game, as your progress through the map determines your power for the next stage, so it's imperative to clear around bosses before you take them on. However, you're up against the clock and each hit takes away precious seconds, and beating bosses is the only way to recover time. The result is that a seemingly brainless shooter actually offers an exciting strategic balance of risk and reward, for those who are willing to find it.



"Harmful Park is a comedy shoot-'em-up in the same manner of Konami's *Parodius* series"



Harmful Park

■ DEVELOPER: SKY THINK SYSTEMS
■ YEAR: 1997 ■ GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

6 The PlayStation isn't as well-recognised for its 2D games as the Saturn, but games like this prove that its non-polygonal offerings shouldn't be discounted. *Harmful Park* is a comedy shoot-'em-up in the same manner as Konami's *Parodius* series. The well-designed stages see you fighting off diverse enemies including gorillas, inflatable dinosaurs and gigantic women. This appears to have been the final game produced by Sky Think Systems, and as a Japan-only release it's not easy to get hold of – original copies regularly sell for over £100. Thankfully, for those of you with access to a Japanese PSN account, it's available digitally on PlayStation platforms for a lower price of ¥600 – less than £5.

iS: Internal Section

■ DEVELOPER: POSITRON
■ YEAR: 1999 ■ GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

5 The most immediately striking thing about *iS: Internal Section* is its visuals. While the PlayStation's hardware allowed for diverse approaches to 3D visuals, most developers stuck with the standard texture-mapped polygons – not so *Positron*. The abstract flat-shaded polygon visuals of *Internal Section* allowed the developer to crank up the resolution and frame rate, creating a game that has aged remarkably gracefully. The game itself is a tube-based shooter in the same manner as *Tempest* and *N2O*, with some interesting twists including a selection of 12 unique weapons and boss battles in which you can adjust the size of the tube. It's another Japan-only release, but screen text is predominantly in English so don't worry about the language barrier.



Guardian's Crusade

■ DEVELOPER: TAMSOF
■ YEAR: 1998 ■ GENRE: RPG

4 *Guardian's Crusade* is an RPG that takes aim at a slightly younger age group than most on the PlayStation, but one which keeps you playing thanks to a solid grasp of the genre's fundamentals. The most obvious concession to the younger audience, other than the relatively light tone, is the monster-raising aspect. If you put in the effort, your companion can be moulded into a formidable fighting partner to aid you on your journey. The game is also renowned for its high-quality translation, besting others of its era by managing to retain much of the humour inherent in the original Japanese script.



Kula World

DEVELOPER: GAME DESIGN SWEDEN AB

YEAR: 1998 ■ GENRE: PUZZLE

3 This abstract puzzler is a real gem, and one of the best mental workouts available on the PlayStation. Each stage takes place in a floating structure comprised of interconnected cubes, and your goal is to guide a beach ball around them, in order to collect keys before reaching the exit. This sounds simple, but is made much more complex by the game's convenient physics – rolling over the edge of a cube won't result in an untimely plummet, but instead a reorientation of gravity. This means that each stage has six different floor surfaces and can be approached in a number of different ways, but the area you want to be in will always be tantalisingly difficult to actually reach. With over 150 stages, *Kula World* will keep you occupied for a long time.

Kula World is an uncommon release, meaning that many of the players who were interested in the full game never got to try it. That rarity meant that copies used to change hands for as much as £50, but it's now much easier to obtain thanks to cheap digital re-releases. Even original copies shouldn't set you back more than around £25 now, with US imports coming in even cheaper.

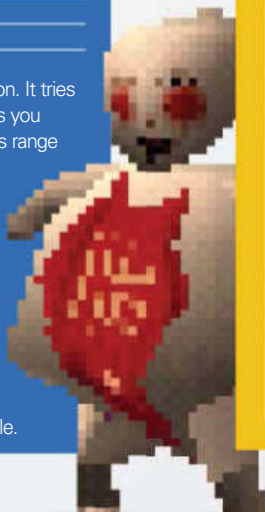


LSD: Dream Emulator

DEVELOPER: OUTSIDE DIRECTORS COMPANY

YEAR: 1998 ■ GENRE: SIMULATION

2 *LSD* is one of the weirdest games on the PlayStation. It tries to simulate the experience of dreaming, and requires you to wander around surreal landscapes. These settings range from realistic historical landscapes to completely abstract dreamscapes, and are populated by characters ranging from humans to ghostly apparitions, animated teddy bears, and more. In any case you'll want to interact with discretion – touching walls and objects will move you to a new environment instantly. *LSD* was a title that exceeded the inaccessibility of most import titles, in that was beyond the reach of most gamers due to its high price – you'd be lucky to find a copy for less than £150. Thankfully, a release on the Japanese PSN has made it more accessible to gamers with a modern console.



No One Can Stop Mr Domino!

DEVELOPER: ARTDINK ■ YEAR: 1998 ■ GENRE: ACTION-PUZZLE

Laying a great line of dominoes is a tricky job at the best of times – one false move and all your time is wasted. So you've got to feel for poor Mr Domino, our titular hero in this game, who has to do so while avoiding obstacles and laying the dominoes from his own back. Yes indeed, it's another weird one – which is perhaps no surprise, given that Artdink's other game in this list is *Aquanaut's Holiday*.

At its core, *Mr Domino* is a score attack puzzle game – your goal is to lay trails of dominoes leading to trick points while you run a predetermined circuit. When you hit your second lap, you'll be able to knock down the previously-laid dominoes and set off the tricks. If you started your chain from the right place, you can even perform trick combos! Of course, as you try to set up your lines you'll be accosted by cats, vegetables and even the odd sumo wrestler. You also have a limited number of dominoes to work with and strict time limits to adhere to, making this a trickier game than you might imagine from just looking at it.

While the gameplay is perfectly good, much of *Mr Domino's* appeal comes from just how weird it is. Your protagonist's tricks quickly escalate from knocking down towers of cards to causing a housewife to discover a bomb in her oven, and later causing a meteor strike. While it's all played off as humour, we do wonder how sympathetic this protagonist is really meant to be...



SILENT HILL



Haunted House, Alone In The Dark, and Resident Evil – three major survival horrors which birthed and evolved the concept. Then suddenly in 1999, some viewing it as bandwagon jumping, Konami gave the genre a darker shade of depravity through Silent Hill. Let's return to that town, a nightmarish place of burned children, satanic cults, and a malevolence which lurks behind the shadows



» Masked bodies suspended, almost crucified on wires, is a recurring theme in *Silent Hill*.

The first *Silent Hill* is the best and the scariest in the entire series. Some controversial statements are opinion, others, such as the one which started this article, are fact. The original's superiority over its follow-ups is the direct result of its limitations; it joins the short list of retro games which are excellent mainly by virtue of their age, and the ingrained facets which result from this. The restrictions of the hardware are what today put this game above its rivals. Let's be crudely blunt here, the grainy, dirty polygon-textures of the first game are honestly more likely to scare the shit out of you than the smoother refined visuals of the sequels. It's one thing to see clearly-defined super-shiny monsters, but it's far more unnerving when the thing you're looking at appears as if it's washed its face with a bundle of rusted razor wire.

Another result of the technical limitations was fogging, even indoors – which was maintained for the sequels despite more powerful hardware. Everything in the original *Silent Hill* is

swathed in either grey mist or darkness. The fog exists in the "real" world, hiding the roaming skinless dogs and other enemies from view, while the inky black of night occurs in the nightmarish alternate reality of the town. It is this other world where most people's fear comes from, as the protagonist, Harry Mason, again and again has to force himself through the horrors of this most unnatural of places. Every surface is encrusted with what appears to be rust, or blood, and the walls are often replaced with barbed wire and chain link fences.

For those that have seen it, the depraved filth-saturated atmosphere, plus other elements of *Silent Hill*, are taken directly from the film *Jacob's Ladder*. Watching this flick, which stars Tim Robbins, it's quite astounding just how much Team Silent borrowed. But there's no attempt to hide various influences, and in fact *Silent Hill* openly boasts of its source material by naming various streets after horror writers and other things connected to surreal and scary forms of media (there are several

Twin Peaks references, which, along with several of Lynch's creations, was also a major influence for the games).

Another of *Silent Hill*'s strengths was its use of sound and audio cues – this again follows the limitations theme. Enemies could not easily be seen, because of the limited draw distance, and so to alert you to their presence a special radio was available. Later games reused the idea, but at the time it was an ingenious decision, and the sheer terror created by the white noise that crackled



» A tank of gasoline! A tank of gasoline! My kingdom for a tank of gasoline!

IN THE KNOW



- » PUBLISHER: KONAMI
- » DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE
- » PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION
- » RELEASED: 1999
- » GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

THE FIRST SILENT HILL IS THE BEST AND THE SCARIEST IN THE ENTIRE SERIES. IT'S BECAUSE OF THE GRAINY, DIRTY POLYGON-TEXTURES



» What the hell is happening? This hideously deformed and crucified figure marks the opening of the game.



» This opening scene in the diner sets up and reveals the importance of the radio.



» Suddenly, whilst in the mall, these TV screens come to life and echo the cries of Harry's lost daughter. It's quite chilling.



» This is the deformed serpent boss. But look to the right. Notice the human body engulfed in flames? Creepy.

out of it was palpable. The sound nurtured a Pavlovian response, where even if enemies can't (or don't exist) the sound of the radio causes an adrenaline spike; at one curdling point, there are invisible ghost children which, while not causing any actual harm, cause the radio to scream static wildly. There is also the sound of random banging and scraping on the walls, as if the abyss' unnatural spawn were trying to break through, into your mind. It's deeply unsettling.

At every opportunity it evokes powerful negative emotions in the player. Later on when discovering a motorbike, shrouded in darkness, and

TERROR IS ALWAYS MORE COMPLETE WHEN COUPLED WITH THE UNCOMFORTABLE REALISATION THAT THERE IS NO HOPE

finding that it's out of petrol, you want to fall to the ground crying, screaming at the TV, begging for just one canister of gasoline so as to escape the nightmare. Faced with such hopelessness and despair, you instead hold the sawn-off shotgun close to your chest and, with a demented glint in a twitching eye, vow that if hell is about to consume you, you'll go down firing and laughing like a deranged psychopathic madman on the edge. Terror is always more complete when coupled with the uncomfortable realisation that there is no hope. *Silent Hill* is always bleak, even with its happiest of endings, and the fact the main protagonist seems trapped in a looping never-ending nightmare (not to mention being on the verge of insanity) makes it seem all the more futile. The inescapability of replayed scenarios lends things a gloriously abhorrent kind of nihilism. Playing it today it's

slow, linear, has convoluted puzzles, and is very clunky. Combat is imprecise, difficult, with limited ammo and too many melee weapons. The whole thing has a giddy surrealism to it, as you fight moths, slugs and giant lizards. But these things must be accepted as intentional and, once acknowledged, the game is still as terrifying and disturbing as it ever was. It was never about combat; Harry Mason is a writer and it's logical that he would have more success running from, than confronting evil. The vague and disorientating puzzles were needed; they helped convey the otherworldly location you had descended into.

The same goes for the bosses, which were a stark contrast to the demonic "general enemies" found throughout. While games like *Resident Evil* had a cohesive internal logic with regards to puzzles and bosses, *Silent Hill* meandered about like a chimpanzee drunk on meths, nauseas and dizzy, forcing you to stumble without being able to catch your balance afterwards. The bosses did not appear as if they belonged, which was a jolt to the system, confusing, unnatural in a world which was already an aberration – it begged the question, was Harry Mason simply going insane? Of course he has problems, but *Silent Hill* uses such a focused (though admittedly borrowed) visual style, and carries it off with such momentum, that it makes for a thrilling dip into chilling and murky waters. And, as we've said, the first is still the best.



» We've always found the unsanitary conditions of the hospital to be deeply unsettling.



» This is precisely what we mean. Large, chunky and pixelated visuals. Filthy and rust-covered, everything conveys a sense of foreboding.

THE KIDS AREN'T ALRIGHT

Censorship of the media. It's a practice employed by tyrannical governments and nefarious agencies wishing to control and manipulate the public consciousness – keeping us passive, and receptive. Pushing us ever deeper into the Orwellian dystopia we are currently in, is the UK version of *Silent Hill*. While both the US and Japanese releases retained all their original content, as its creators intended, when the game hit Britannia's censorship-besieged shores it lost one of its main monsters. The Grey Children (pictured), which inhabit the school, were removed. They were ugly-looking monsters which wielded knives, and apparently the ominous noise they make is the sound of children laughing, digitally slowed down. They freaked the hell out of us. They were replaced with Mumbler, strange brown dwarven monsters with claws, which weren't nearly as disturbing. So if you're going to play *Silent Hill* (and you really should as it's an amazing experience) make sure you get the US version. It's not only free of all that nasty censorship, but also runs at 60Hz, which instantly improves the gameplay.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GENSO SUIKODEN (PICTURED)

SYSTEMS: PS1, SATURN
YEAR: 1995


LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1991

TOKIMEKI MEMORIAL

SYSTEMS: PC ENGINE
YEAR: 1994





TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

A precursor to the Jackass generation headlined by an upcoming sports icon, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater not only heralded a new type of videogame genre but signalled the arrival of an entire culture. Looking back at where it all began, Neversoft co-founder Mick West discusses the humble origins of one of the biggest franchises of all time





» Neversoft didn't completely abandon the idea of linear downhill courses. Two of the main stages – Mall and Downhill Jam – retain the original concept inspired by Sega's *Top Skater*.

In 1999, as publisher Activision was circling the idea of an extreme sports title, pro skateboarder Tony Hawk peered over the edge of a half-pipe at the X-Games tournament in San Francisco, bracing himself as he prepared to attempt one of the sport's most complicated tricks: the 900. An aerial spin involving two-and-a-half turns, this was skateboarding's Holy Grail at the time, residing just out of reach even to the sport's most distinguished competitors.

When the 32-year-old Hawk landed the trick, in an instant it became one of the most talked about sporting moments of the year. It successfully raised the global profile of both Hawk and skateboarding overnight. The world took notice. Activision had found its next sports game.

Sensing the impending boom of extreme sports culture and identifying a niche in the games industry, several marketing executives at Activision came to the conclusion that a skateboarding game would be a sure-fire hit with a young demographic. What it didn't have was a studio to make it a reality.

"We were the natural choice to do it," responds Neversoft co-founder Mick West when asked how the studio got involved with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. "We were just finishing up *Apocalypse* and they wanted to use us for something else. Pretty much straight away they approved us to make an exploratory game prototype and it worked out well."

However, before Neversoft was given the greenlight it was another studio that had originally pitched the idea of a skateboarding game to Activision. The format didn't quite click with the publisher but it liked the concept, so it turned to Neversoft – a studio that had recently helped them out of a bind by turning around the Bruce Willis-starring action game *Apocalypse* in nine months after its original developer dropped out – to make it happen.

"It was attractive to them because we were a team ready to go and we had a lot of skill in getting out a game quickly," says Mick. "They weren't thinking that *Tony Hawk* was going to be the huge seller that it was. They wanted to get a game out on the market by next Christmas and we were the team that could do that."

» Tony Hawk has appeared in eight sequels since the 1999 original.



IN THE KNOW

- » PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
- » DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT
- » PLATFORM: VARIOUS
- » RELEASED: 1999
- » GENRE: EXTREME SPORTS

SKATER PROFILES

A closer look at the roster of characters



TONY HAWK

■ The world's most famous skateboarder retired his board in 1999 but continues to promote skating worldwide.



BOB BURNQUIST

■ Still an active pro skater, in 2010 Burnquist was the fifth person to pull off the infamous 900.



KAREEM CAMPBELL

■ Campbell has become one of the most successful skaters to come out of the US.



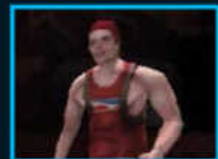
RUNE GLIFBERG

■ Hailing from Denmark, he remains an active skater and recently released a line of signature Converse shoes.



BUCKY LASEK

■ Alongside his professional skateboarding career, Lasek is also a professional rallycross driver.



CHAD MUSKA

■ One of the most influential skaters, Muska's recent achievements include opening an alternative clothing store.



ANDREW REYNOLDS

■ As well as his board prowess, Reynolds is a successful entrepreneur.



GEOFF ROWLEY

■ Liverpool-born Geoff Rowley was given *Thrasher* magazine's coveted Skater Of The Year Award in 2000.



ELISSA STEAMER

■ The first professional female skater, Steamer was last awarded Bronze at the Summer X-Games 2009.

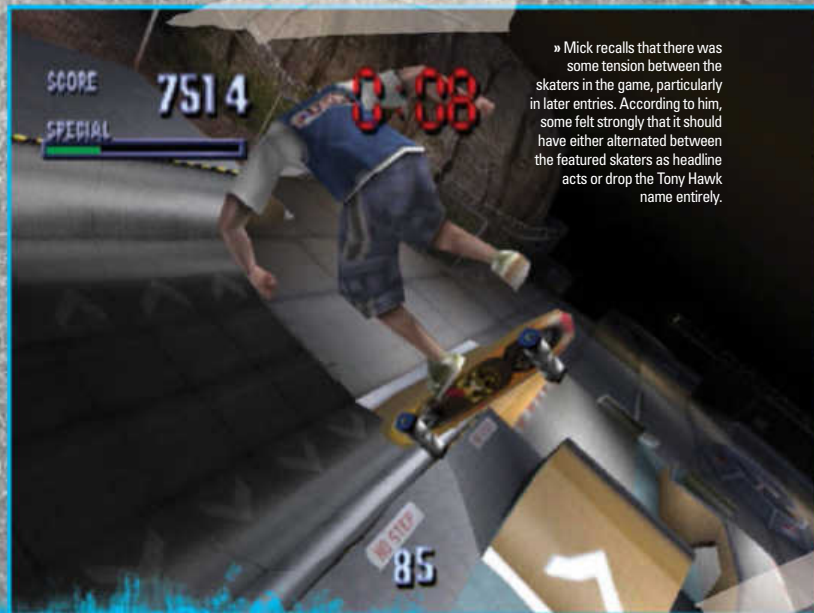


JAMIE THOMAS

■ Nicknamed 'The Chief' Jamie Thomas performed the infamous 'Leap Of Faith' down an 18-foot, 8-inch drop.



» If you look very closely in the Mall level you'll notice a reference to Neversoft's previous game, *Apocalypse*.



» Mick recalls that there was some tension between the skaters in the game, particularly in later entries. According to him, some felt strongly that it should have either alternated between the featured skaters as headline acts or drop the Tony Hawk name entirely.

“The mo-cap session was never actually used – it was more of a publicity thing”

Mick West



The tracklist of Tony Hawk's Pro Skater

DEAD KENNEDYS
Police Truck

THE ERNIES
Here And Now

EVEN RUDE
Villified

GOLDFINGER
Superman

PRIMUS
Jerry Was A Race
Car Driver

SPEEDEALER
Screamer/Nothing to Me

THE SUKIDE MACHINES
Cyco Vision

THE SUKIDE MACHINES
New Girl

UNSAFE
Committed

THE VANDALS
Euro-Barge

► There was one small problem, though. Neversoft had never made a skateboarding game before – it hadn't even made a sports game before. Where did the relatively unknown studio start when it came to creating one of the most popular gaming franchises of all time?

“The thing about Neversoft was there was a bowling alley opposite the offices,” remembers Mick. “We'd go there for lunch sometimes and it had a *Top Skater* machine which was popular with members of the office and that influenced the original thinking.”

Created by *Crazy Taxi* creator Kenji Kanno and released by Sega in 1997, *Top Skater* featured a skateboard controller that players stand on to guide skaters down a linear course, performing tricks to get a high score. “We enjoyed playing that game so we tried to make something similar to that,” reveals Mick. “You'd go from the start to the end and when you got to the end you'd stop and get a score. It was like a racing game, really – you're basically trying to get around or along a track.”

A part of this original thinking remains in the game: two of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater's* courses are downhill with a



» While most of the environments were complete inventions, Burnside was based on a real skatepark in Portland, Oregon.

finish line at the end. However, the idea evolved after the team began studying real-life skaters.

“Things changed drastically when we tried to incorporate elements that we saw in the X-Games,” recalls Mick. “People doing tricks in a half-pipe; you can't really get that half-pipe vibe on a downhill course – a half-pipe is going back and forth, over the same spots again and again. So the [original] idea ended up not being as much fun to play as we first thought and the whole game changed over time.”

What became obvious was the necessity to enable players to concentrate on and express themselves through the tricks system. Neversoft poured over professional tapes, scrutinising the movements and style of top skaters, and began to integrate boardslides, nosebones and heelflips

into the game (which was currently using the existing player model of Bruce Willis from *Apocalypse* as an avatar) understanding that authenticity would be needed to legitimise the concept. But it quickly became apparent that they would need a pro skater to help guide the rest of development.

By the time Tony Hawk signed on to headline the game, Neversoft had already been using the skater as a basis for some of the animations and moves featured in the game, helping to inform the direction of the title. However, with Hawk's star rising, confirmation of his involvement shined a spotlight on the game's development.

“Tony was wildly popular at the time because he got a lot of coverage for doing the 900 for the first time at the X-Games,” remembers Mick. “It was an epic thing and he was instantly the most famous skateboarder around. His persona really was a huge part of the publicity for the game. You can see some of the other games suffered from that. Competing skating games were just ‘Skating’ or something like that and didn't have the same star power, so it certainly helped.”



» Players could customise their character by choosing different boards, handling and wheel colour. It didn't make much difference to performance but added a touch of personality.

5 EXTREME SPORTS TITLES

We present a selection of other celebrity-endorsed extreme sports games



DAVE MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX 2000

■ Dave Mirra's inaugural videogame effort rides on the coattails of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* somewhat, using it as a template for its own trick-based BMX gameplay. It was nowhere near as impressive as its inspiration but put amazing ragdoll physics to good use to make its crashes all the more brutal.



SUNNY GARCIA SURFING 2001

■ Veteran surfer Sunny Garcia headlines this extreme sports sim that trades realism for wish-fulfilment. Instead of utilising real-world locations, *Sunny Garcia Surfing* invents its own island that boasts the largest waves in the world. Although, it's also teeming with sharks, jet skis and other hazardous objects to avoid.



MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2001

■ Hoping to strike gold twice, Activision's *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* is, as you can imagine, an adaptation of the publisher's own *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. Using a modified version of the *Tony Hawk* engine, the carbon-copy gameplay involves passing a series of objectives in each stage to progress to the next level.



KELLY SLATER'S PRO SURFER 2002

■ Another entry in Activision's Pro series of extreme sports titles, *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer* involved stringing tricks together to achieve the highest possible score. Unfortunately, the concept was nowhere near as polished as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, with clunky animations and a noticeable lack of depth.



SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING 2008

■ While the original multiformat release garnered a lukewarm reception, it was the Wii version – titled *Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip* – that received the most favourable critical reception. Using the Wii Balance Board to cut through the slopes, White's first game was decent if not particularly remarkable.

Instantly Activision used Tony's involvement to make the wider media aware of the game's production. Journalists from around the world were invited to watch a mo-cap session, where Tony (dressed in a lycra suit covered in white balls) would perform a series of signature moves to be translated into the game. The event was a huge success, but as Mick remembers it wasn't particularly helpful to the continued development of the game. "The mo-cap session was never actually used," he states. "It was more of a publicity thing."

Activision was never under any false impression that the mo-cap data would prove useful to Neversoft. In fact, the studio warned the publisher that it was almost certain the data would be useless. "Activision was going to do it regardless for publicity," continues Mick. "Our animator couldn't really do anything with [the data] because it was not something that we were familiar with using and we had a lot of the animations coming along anyway. We ended up doing everything animate by hand using video reference."

Interestingly, Hawk wouldn't get involved in the design – he offered his thoughts on a few occasions when he visited the studio. When it came to replicating the style and movements of skaters, it was all down to the team figuring it out as they went along. Flip tricks off quarter-pipes, the satisfaction of holding a handstand off the lip, or just perfecting a grind along a handrail – this was new territory for the team and it all had to feel intuitive.

Having taken over player control halfway through development on the

first game, Mick implemented the physics and control scheme that would be fundamental to the title's accessible nature. It was a major turning point in development. "In the first game [player control] was quite simple," he says. "You had a table mapping button presses to tricks. It got a lot more complicated in subsequent games. One of the key things about *Tony Hawk* is that it feels very nice to play. It's very responsive. You hold down the X button to crouch and you release to jump. It's very tight, you feel like you're controlling it. It's not like you're pressing it and something happens a tenth of a second later. That's one of the factors that contributed to the success of the game. It was fun to simply skate around and jump off things without really doing anything because it felt so responsive."

Mick ironed out a lot of the bugs – one particular problem involved skaters falling through the level – while adding features such as grinding on rails and wall riding. But it was becoming clear that if it truly wanted to push significant boundaries in the sports genre then the studio would need to look further afield for influence.

"*Super Mario 64* had been out for a while and the concept of open-world games was becoming popular," he continues. This was part of the drift away from the mould of *Top Skater* towards an open-world game. The first level in *Pro Skater*, Warehouse, was fairly basic in terms of level design; a box-like shape with ramps, half-pipes and destructible objects grafted to the scenery. While rudimentary by today's standards, even this fairly limited layout offered a



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

APOCALYPSE

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

YEAR: 1998

SPIDER-MAN

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

YEAR: 2000

GUN (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

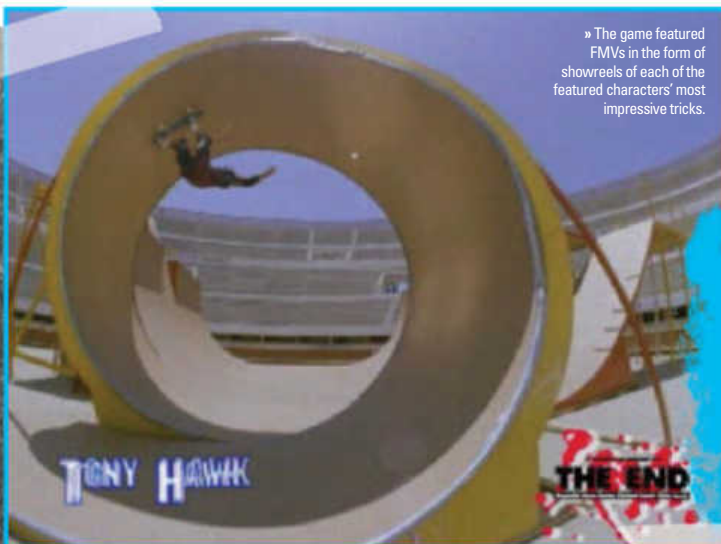
YEAR: 2005

► rare sense of freedom for the player. “The original *Tony Hawk* starts with the Warehouse which is a small level, while the second is the School level, which is much more open,” considers Mick. “In the first game we weren’t using that much reference, so they weren’t really based on real places as they were on later games. You sit down and think off the tip of your head ‘what environments does a skater skate in?’ An empty school is an obvious one, as is a city. We were thinking of areas off the top of our head and trying to think of the real-life things that would be in those levels. In a school, you can go down the railings of steps – that would be a real-life thing. You had to make it a lot more fun as well so you’d stick a lot of quarter-pipes everywhere and let people grind along the tops of walls or phone lines that aren’t very real at all. You’ve got this mixture of reference

to real things with other elements that make it more fun.”

Pro Skater isn’t a realistic game, and Neversoft prioritised fun over simulating skating to a precise degree. After leaping in the air 30 feet, grinding along phone lines and jumping from roof-to-roof, it’s fair to assume that the studio wasn’t aiming for realistic physics. This approach matched with the open layout of the level design impacted how progression would be defined within the game.

“Collecting the tapes is analogous to collecting the stars in *Mario*,” says Mick, once again referencing the seminal Nintendo 64 title. “Each level had five things to do to complete that level and we just brainstormed them. We sat in front of a whiteboard and I drew a level and said ‘what can we do?’ and we would start throwing out ideas and writing them down.”



» The game featured FMVs in the form of showreels of each of the featured characters' most impressive tricks.



“It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design”

Mick West

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE TONY HAWK FRANCHISE

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER 2

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER 3

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER 2X

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER 4

TONY HAWK'S
UNDERGROUND

TONY HAWK'S
UNDERGROUND 2

TONY HAWK'S
AMERICAN WASTELAND

THE MAKING OF: TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

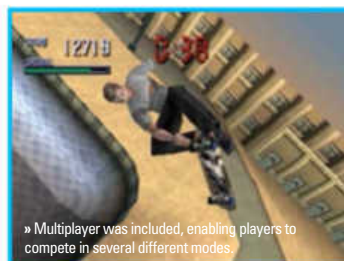
There were some abandoned concepts, not to mention a few levels (one based along a pier, another on a freeway) that didn't make the cut. The process was collaborative, however Mick reiterates that the team always prioritised fun over gratuitous realism.

"People were always coming up with silly ideas that wouldn't work," he says. "People would say 'what if one of the wheels on your skateboard falls off and you have to skate around on three wheels leaning to one side to go back and get another wheel?' That would be no fun whatsoever. The fun factor is a big consideration in any game idea – people seem to miss that.

They think realism is more important than fun. It's not really fun to fall over and break your leg in real life so we didn't simulate that."

Mick reflects on how the studio approached creating a brand new type of game. "The biggest challenge was learning how to do it. We didn't know what we were doing and therefore there was a lot more experimentation."

The team had been familiar with the genres it had explored in previous titles. *Apocalypse* was a third-person shooter, which was also similar to a prototype the studio had worked on before getting



the job. When it came to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, the studio had to think on its feet and adapt to the challenges it faced as it cut its teeth in the sports genre. "Skating was very new," says Mick. "It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design. The concepts were alien to people working on the game. It was a new type of game."

That sentiment was shared with consumers upon the game's release. Few games have ever penetrated the cultural zeitgeist quite like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* at the time. Before the *Jackass* generation had ever peeled their first Band-Aid, Neversoft had managed to encapsulate both the incipient prominence of extreme sports and the rebellious, carefree counter-culture of an emerging youth scene. Unsurprisingly, Mick cites the iconic soundtrack as integral to this: "The music was a big thing," he says. "It's not like it's authentic hardcore skating music of the time but it was novel to have a game that had such an interesting soundtrack of music playing in the background all the time. For a lot of skateboarders music is very important to them."

Mick had no idea how important the soundtrack would be to the game's legacy. Its initial implementation was a matter of convenience – the existing engine could support music tracks and video walls (the latter featured heavily across the levels). All that was left was for Activision to pick the tracks.

"It was also capturing skate culture with logos, stickers and using concepts like videoing the moves and collecting tapes, things like that," explains Mick. "They were all taking from skate culture. We tried to do as much things that directly reflected or referenced skating culture as possible."

But what Mick didn't expect was how it would contribute directly to the boom in skating's popularity. Ultimately, with the accessibility of the control scheme matched with a huge amount of depth made it was an essential gaming experience, but Hawk's endorsement gained it a far-reaching appeal. Even though there wasn't anything quite like it on the marketplace, Mick remembers his confidence in the game's success.

"My defining memory was just before the first game was released and I was going out to lunch with the chief executive of Activision at the time," he says. "He was talking about the game and he said something like 'I think this game is going to do fairly well' and I said 'I know it's going to do well. It's going to be a million-selling game.' He said 'we'll see'. And then of course it was. He didn't know what he had at the time and I felt strongly that it was going to be huge," concludes Mick. "I look back at the conversation with particular fondness." *

» The main campaign is divided between objective-based courses and competition stages. The latter involves scoring a certain amount of points to gain medals.

» Rather than hire external developers with experience working in the sports genre, Neversoft felt there was no game comparable and therefore it was the same team as *Apocalypse* that worked on the game.



TONY HAWK'S
DOWNHILL JAM

TONY HAWK'S
PROJECT 8

TONY HAWK'S
PROVING GROUND

TONY HAWK'S
MOTION

TONY HAWK:
RIDE

TONY HAWK:
SHRED

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER HD

BIO

Prior lightgun games had simply required the player to be quicker and more accurate than the enemy, but *Time Crisis* included a foot pedal which allowed the player to dive in and out of cover to reload – an incredibly simple idea which added a new layer of depth to the genre. However, the entire game took place against the clock, adding pressure and ensuring that players couldn't be too methodical in their approach to blasting the bad guys. *Time Crisis* became a massive hit in 1995, ensuring the release of a PlayStation conversion as well as a series of sequels.

Time Crisis

» PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION » DEVELOPER: NAMCO » RELEASED: 1995

The arrival of powerful 3D boards in the Nineties allowed arcade game designers to exercise their cinematic skills, thanks to the range of camera angles that were now easily available. However, many games only employed these techniques sparingly in attract modes – after all, directing cinematic action means taking control from the player. *Time Crisis* was already on rails due to being a lightgun game, so there was no such restriction – and Namco made the most of it.

One of the best examples is a particularly exciting scene late in Stage Two. The player's character, Richard Miller, is running through a corridor. He catches sight of himself reflected in a mirror at the end of the corridor, but that's not all he sees – an enemy guard rounds the corner shortly after him and lets off a shot, narrowly missing Miller and shattering the mirror directly in front of him. Miller then swings around, allowing the player to shoot the enemy. The scene lasts only a few seconds, but leaves a permanent impression on players and spectators alike. *





MORE CLASSIC TIME CRISIS MOMENTS

Explosive arrival

Continuing the cinematic theme, Richard Miller's arrival in the first stage is full of action. Sliding down a zip line into the enemy base, the carnage escalates quickly – as enemy troops scramble to deal with the intruding secret agent, a submarine in the background explodes and begins to sink as red warning lights illuminate the area. You don't spend long in this first area, but it makes a huge impact.



Secret agent

Finding secrets in arcade games is always satisfying, just for those moments when you get to impress a spectator who hasn't yet seen them. Early in Stage Two of *Time Crisis* you'll come across some girders. If you shoot the wrap that's holding them together a few times, they'll fall and send all the enemies fleeing, saving yourself valuable seconds in the race to rescue the President's daughter.



Backpedal

Time Crisis doesn't just throw gun-toting bad guys at you – the entire environment can be called into action as a hazard. A battle amidst a group of parked cars quickly takes a turn for the worse for our hero as a car comes sliding around the corner and begins to drive straight towards him, requiring quick release of the pedal in order to avoid eating bumper.



Unfriendly dialogue

Part of the charm of *Time Crisis* is that the dialogue is hilariously bad. Lines like "How could you? You killed my boss!" wouldn't make the script of even the cheapest of cheap B-movies. The character who best combines hammy voice acting and risible writing is Sherudo Garo, the second stage boss, who decides that you need to be 'entertained' – so he slings throwing knives at you. Obviously...



03

WAR TIME
TOP TIME

08' 37" 90
06' 14" 00

CRASH BANDICOOT®

The mid-Nineties were an interesting time in gaming. Technology was rapidly advancing and the community was ready for something new. Even so, it's hard to believe anyone expected something as fresh and innovative as Crash Bandicoot. Cole Machin talks to Andrew Gavin about Sony's surprise mascot



IN THE KNOW

- » PUBLISHER: SONY
- » DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG
- » PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION
- » RELEASED: 1996
- » GENRE: PLATFORMER

As gamers, we typically like to think of the average blockbuster release as being something that was planned in infinitesimal detail. We tend to conjure up images in our mind of a big corporate boardroom, filled with serious-looking fellows in suits and armed with sales reports and market research. We envision flow charts, slides and whatever else we used before PowerPoint. Sometimes it's hard to remember that some of the greatest games ever developed came about organically, that they started off as nothing more than a great idea between two friends, and that sometimes the story of how the game came to be is almost as interesting as the game itself.

To really understand the story of *Crash Bandicoot*, we first need to discuss a little bit of the history behind those who created it – Andrew Gavin and Jason Rubin, who have been long time business partners. Having founded the company that would later become Naughty Dog while still in high school (at the tender age of 16, no less), by 1994 the two had a long and accomplished resume that included games such as *Keef The Thief* and *Rings Of Power*. It was not until college, however, that the two students would invest their own money in what would become the game most responsible for

truly launching their careers, *Way Of The Warrior*, a fighting game for the 3DO platform. It was the game that first drew the attention of a little publishing company known as Universal Interactive Studios.

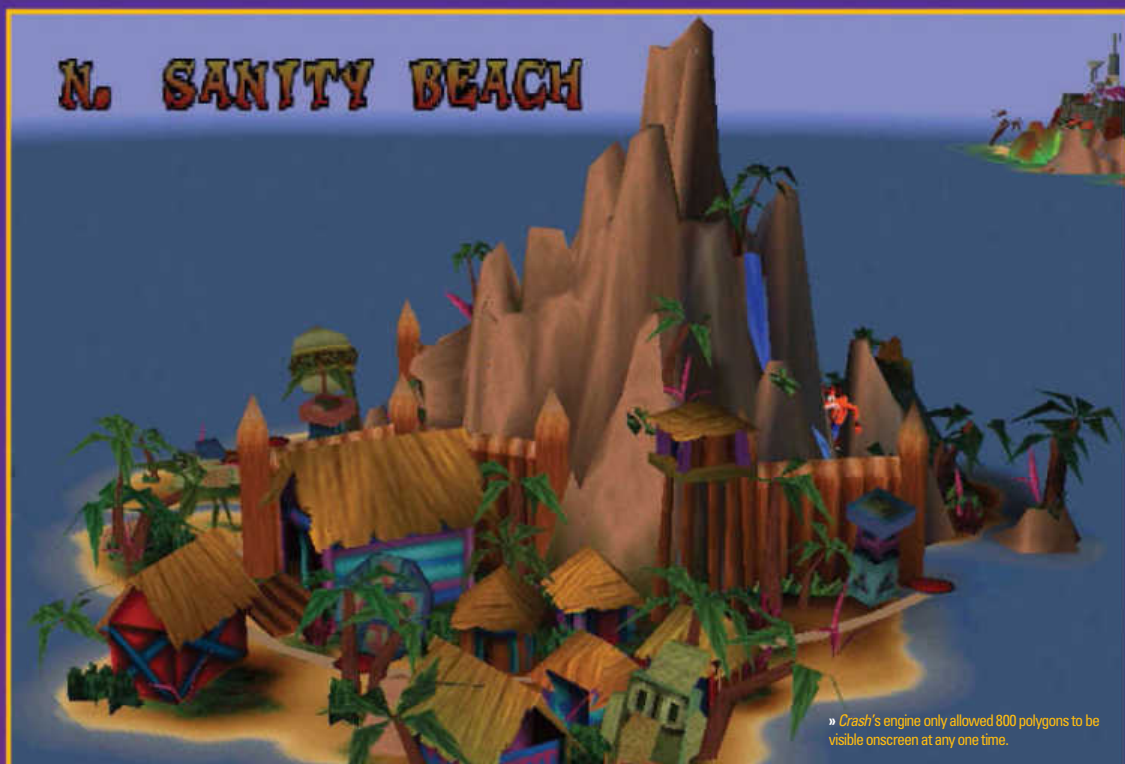
After the release of *Way Of The Warrior*, Naughty Dog was signed to a three-game contract with U.I.S. and given office space on Universal's lot. With this deal in place, Naughty Dog was a company on the move, literally. The company shifted its headquarters from Boston to Los Angeles. While such a road trip usually provides

friends with plenty of reasons to become rather annoyed with one another, Gavin and Rubin managed to be a great deal more productive.

"Jason and I had been debating our next game for months, but the three-day drive from Boston to LA provided ample opportunity. Having studied arcade games intensely – in 1994 they were still relevant – we couldn't help but notice that two or three of the leading genres had really begun making the transition into full 3D rendering. Racing had, with *Ridge Racer* and *Virtua Racing*;



» The Whole Hog level stands out as a fan favourite.



» Crash's engine only allowed 800 polygons to be visible onscreen at any one time.



» One interesting aspect of *Crash Bandicoot* was the mixture of conventional platforming and 3D adventure.



» *Crash Bandicoot*'s zany characters are often cited as one of the franchise's greatest strengths.

NEW DOG, NEW TRICKS

IF NAUGHTY DOG'S original intent was to create a new and iconic gaming mascot, it would seem that there can be little doubt about its success. Since the original game's release in 1996, Crash has gone on to star in an additional 17 titles available on over half a dozen various platforms. Perhaps even more importantly, the character has moved beyond the constraints of his original platforming genre and stepped up to compete with the big boys in nearly every genre in which Sonic The Hedgehog or Mario have found success. Over the years, Crash has risen to the challenges presented by and competed with such gaming power houses as *Mario Kart 64* and the *Mario Party* series. The greatest example of the strength of the original concept and character design, however, shows in the character's continued popularity despite difficulties encountered as control of the *Crash Bandicoot* IP changed hands, going from Naughty Dog to Traveller's Tales to Radical Entertainment.



fighting, with *Virtua Fighter*, and gun games, with *Virtua Cop*. Racing was clearly 100 per cent better in 3D, and while *Virtua Fighter* wasn't as playable as *Street Fighter*, the writing was on the wall. Sensing opportunity, we turned to our own favourite genre, the character platform action game (CAG for short)."

It was not until the second day of the drive, however, that inspiration would come from a rather unusual and unpleasant source.

"Passing Chicago and traveling through America's long flat heartland,

that the concept behind Sonic's Ass was brilliant and, at the time, unique. To the team's knowledge, no other developer had begun any sort of work trying to bring this well-loved genre into the world of three-dimensional gaming. The question that faced the now-four-man team was clear: what system would best meet their needs?

"The 3DO was DOA, but we also got our hands on specs for the upcoming Sega Saturn, the Sega 32X, and the mysterious Sony PlayStation. The decision really

in this field of gaming needed to be considered. If the team developed for Sega, then its new character would always play second fiddle to the well-established and wildly popular Sonic the Hedgehog. Similarly, Nintendo seemed to already have some sort of rotund plumber gamers were fond of. Sony, on the other hand, didn't even have a mascot – a void that Naughty Dog might just manage to fill. From this, Willie the Wombat was born.

If Naughty Dog was going to create the next *Sonic* or *Mario*, the next challenge would lay in making

“ Sony's track record in videogames was nil, but it was a sexy company and a sexy machine ”

fed on McDonalds, and accompanied by a gassy Labrador/Ridgeback mix (also fed on McDonalds), the idea came to us. We called it the 'Sonic's Ass' game. And it was born from the question: what would a 3D CAG be like? 'Well,' we thought, 'you'd spend a lot of time looking at Sonic's ass.' Aside from the difficulties of identifying with a character only viewed in posterior, it seemed cool."

By the time the duo had arrived in Los Angeles, the idea had begun to firm up. As such, they presented it to Universal Vice President Mark Cerny and Naughty Dog's newest (and first) employee, Dave Baggett. All agreed

didn't take very long. 3DO: poor 3D power, and no sales. 32X: unholy Frankenstein's monster – and no sales. Saturn: also a crazy hybrid design, and really clunky dev units. Then there was Sony. Its track record in videogames was nil, but it was a sexy company and a sexy machine – by far the best of the lot. I won't even bring up the Jaguar."

Beyond the technical elements, however, there was perhaps an even more important factor involved in the decision. If the team's plans were to create a new character-driven platformer, the console manufacturer's previous successes

the main character fun and lovable and, of course, in creating a villain that could remain fresh and fun throughout an entire franchise.

"I remember it clearly. The four of us were eating at this mediocre Italian near Universal and I had this idea of an evil genius villain with a big head. Obviously, brainy cartoon villains have big heads. He was all about his attitude and his minions. Videogames need lots of minions. We imagined The Brain from *Pinky And The Brain* combined with minions like the weasels in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*; a villain, all full of himself, unable to conceive of ever



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CRASH TEAM RACING

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

YEAR: 1999

JAK & DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY

SYSTEM: PS2

YEAR: 2001

UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: PS3

YEAR: 2009

doing anything the simple way, but constantly (in his eyes) betrayed by the incompetence of his henchmen.

"I put on my silly villain voice and intoned, 'If you had three neurons between you, you couldn't make a triangle!' With this attitude, his name, Doctor Neo Cortex, popped instantly into our heads."

Charles Zembillas and Joe Pearson were then tasked with designing the look of the decidedly cartoony cast of characters, creating the fantastic look and feel that the *Crash Bandicoot* series would later become known for. The most fantastic designs in the world, however, are nothing if the game's designers are unable to squeeze the same look and feel out of the gaming hardware with which they are to be presented, and this proved problematic for the fledgling Naughty Dog team.

"Dave struggled to build an engine and tool pipeline that would make it possible to render these grandiose cartoon worlds we had envisioned on paper. We made a bunch of really innovative choices that influenced our direction.

"The PlayStation had this oddball 512x240 video mode that almost no-one ever used, mostly because it ate up too much video memory and didn't give you enough room for textures. But at the same time we found the machine was really good at rendering shaded, but un-textured, triangles. In fact, it did this just as fast in the 512 mode as in the typical 320 mode. Since polygons on small 3D characters didn't end up very big anyway, it turned out that shaded characters actually looked better than textured ones.

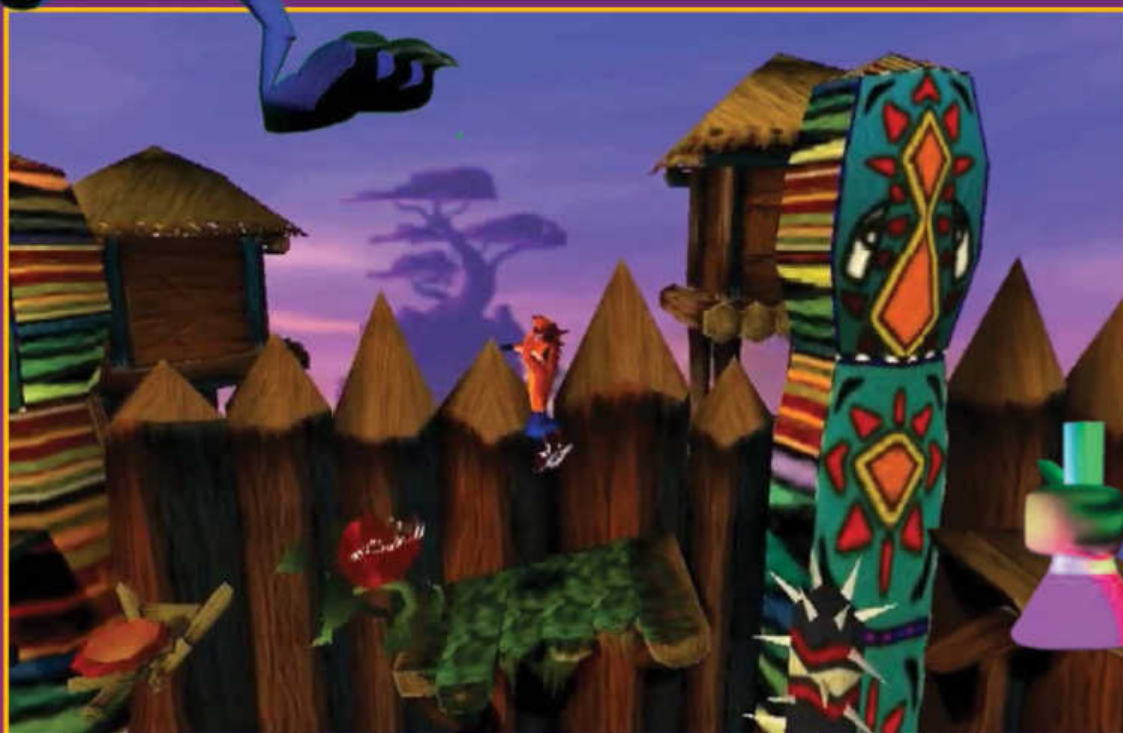
"I also concocted a crazy algorithmic texture packer that would deal with the fact that our gorgeous 512x240 mode left us with too little texture memory, and the even crazier – way crazier – virtual memory system required to shoehorn the 8-16MB levels the artists created into the PlayStation's little 2MB of RAM. Dave, meanwhile, had to invent insane bidirectional 10x

compressors to help get the 128 MB levels down into 12 MB, and figure out some tool for managing the construction of our gigantic 3D worlds."

Developing the overall gameplay of such an innovative title also presented some challenges. When *Crash Bandicoot* first began development, nothing like it had been done before. There was no pre-existing three dimensional variation on platforming titles to dissect in terms of what worked and what did not. Even something as seemingly basic as the control structure required multiple reworkings.

"I did all of the programming on it, but Mark helped a lot with the complaining. For example, 'He doesn't stop fast enough,' or 'He needs to be able to jump for a frame or two *after* he's run off a cliff or it

“We made a bunch of really innovative choices that influenced our direction”



» According to folklore, if the head of Universal Interactive Entertainment had had his way, Crash would have been called 'Wizzy the Wombat' or 'Ozzie the Ottsel'.

MASCOT MARKETING

AROUND THE TIME of *Crash Bandicoot*'s release, it was almost impossible not to think of Crash whenever anyone mentioned the Sony PlayStation. Though he may not have been the system's official mascot, advertising campaigns for the game seemed spun to ensure that any viewer would associate the game with Sony's entrance into the console market. This was more noticeable in some advertisements than others. For example, one commercial featured Crash Bandicoot arriving at Nintendo headquarters to taunt Mario by

way of loudspeaker. Furthermore, the only scene showing gameplay footage of *Crash Bandicoot* devoted nearly as much screen space to the PlayStation controller as it did to the game itself. Similarly, an early Australian advertisement for the game, which featured a gentleman acting as though he were Crash while in a convenience store, displayed the official PlayStation logo on the bottom-left hand side of the screen throughout its entire 30-second duration, before ending with the now-famous slogan 'Do Not Underestimate The Power of The PlayStation'.

will be frustrating.' Jason's also really good at the detection of flaws."

Every aspect of the game would need to go through this sort of process; even some of the game's most notable elements came about as an elegant solution to difficulties encountered through the change into 3D gaming. The crates, perhaps one of *Crash Bandicoot*'s defining features, were conceived as a way to compensate for the PlayStation's inability to display more than between two and four incredibly high poly count enemies.

As the game shaped up, the team realised that it would require a publisher. At this point, its contract with Sony was for development only, with the assumption being that Naughty Dog would need to, at some

point, find a third-party publisher if the game were ever to see the light of day. This was a slight problem, as Naughty Dog's bid to create a new mascot for Sony would greatly benefit from additional involvement from the company. Thankfully, Gavin had a brilliant back-door solution to this minor problem.

"Around Thanksgiving 1995, I and one of our artists, Taylor Kurosaki, who had a TV editing background, took footage from the game and spent two days editing it into a two-minute 'preview tape'. We deliberately leaked this to a friend at Sony so that the brass would see it.

"They liked what they saw. Management shakeups at Sony slowed the process, but by March of 1996 Sony and Universal had struck



» The cartoony, brightly coloured tribal feel contributed a lot to the visual appeal of the early series.



a deal for Sony to do the publishing. While Sony never officially declared us their mascot, in all practical senses we became one."

Needless to say, when the finished game was released the response was huge. Not only did gamers flock to this new genre of gaming in droves, but the name Crash Bandicoot would go on to become synonymous with PlayStation in a way that only Lara Croft could compete with. Indeed, Sony may never have set out looking for a mascot but they got one nonetheless; a mascot that millions worldwide would come to love. Naughty Dog had accomplished something that no third-party developer had done before or since; it had created an iconic character that would stand shoulder to shoulder with *Sonic* and *Mario*. 40 million copies later – across various games – and Crash Bandicoot is still going strong today. We wonder if Willy the Wombat would have had the same eventual success...



» The majority of the game's bosses provided not only a challenge but also comic relief.



» Crash's crates began life as a way of adding level content in the lieu of enough memory to fill the screen with baddies.



Racing By Design

Arguably the PlayStation's most iconic racing franchise, buckle up and hold tight as Stuart Hunt recounts the history of WipEout, Sony's most enduring racing series.



3
65
(IN>TRO





"History" of WipeOut

The Complete History of WipeOut



Game designer Nick Burcombe, graphic artist Jim Bowers, The Surfaris, beer, and the Amiga game

Matrix Marauders are all to be thanked for jumpstarting *WipeOut*.

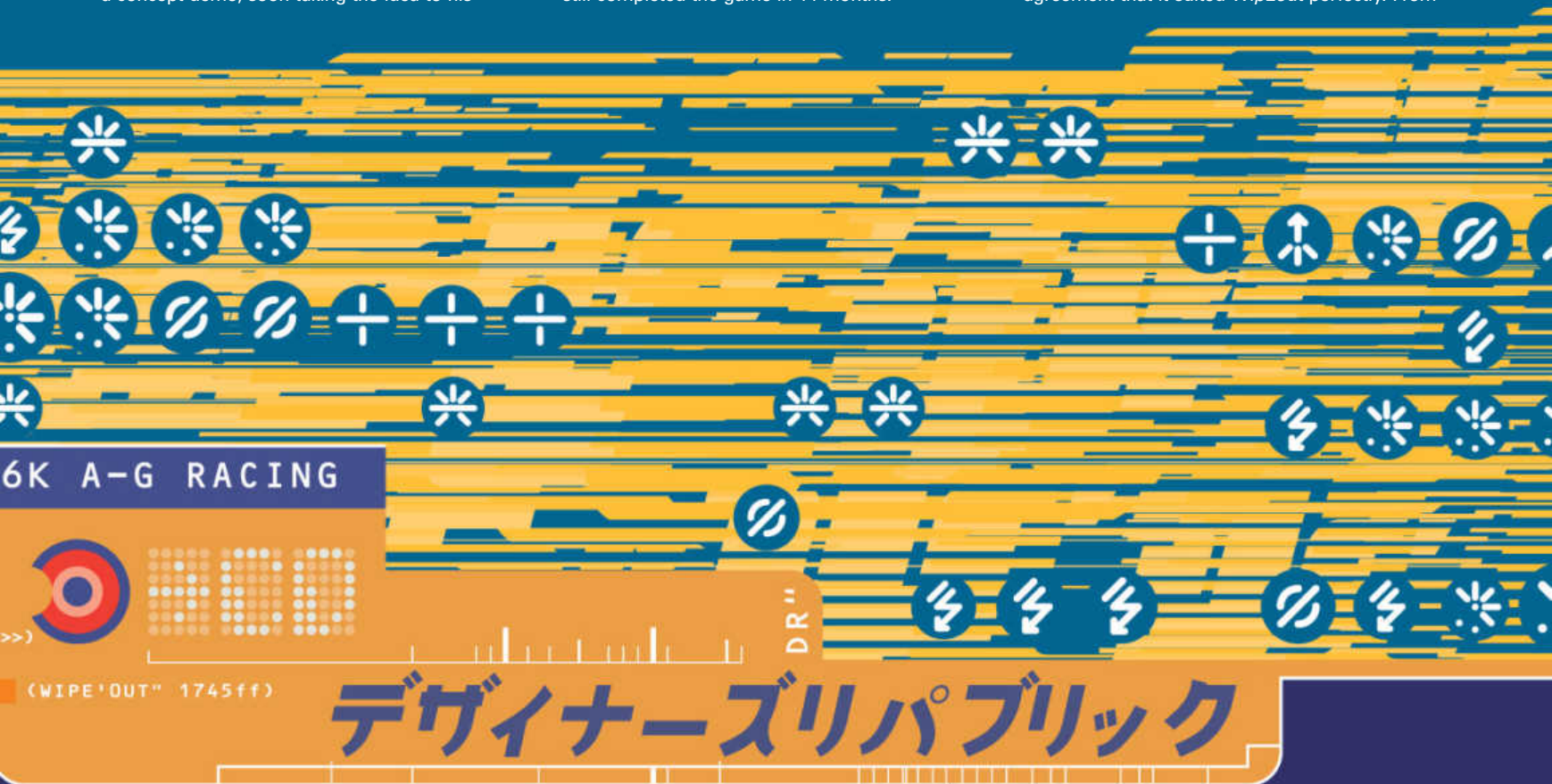
After seeing an animation for *Matrix Marauders*, which artist Jim Bowers was working on, showing two *WipeOut*-style ships from the game racing each other, Nick was hit with the inspiration to create a futuristic racing game. The two men got together and fleshed out the idea between gulps of ale and excitable chitchat in their local pub, and came up with a title inspired by The Surfaris' hit song *Wipe Out*. An enthusiastic Jim got to work on creating a concept demo, soon taking the idea to his

colleagues at Psygnosis. *WipeOut* was quickly thrust into production, with Nick as lead designer.

As well as *Matrix Marauders*, many other games would influence *WipeOut*'s design, including *F-Zero*, Michael Powell's 3D futuristic racer *Powerdrome* and Psygnosis' *Infestation*. But, as Nick revealed in our making of *WipeOut* feature in *Retro Gamer* issue 35, it was *Super Mario Kart*'s battle-themed racing antics that provided the largest portion of the roadmap that *WipeOut* would follow. As work progressed, the small team of ten faced a tight deadline. It was a schedule made even tighter when well into production it was decided that the code should be restarted from scratch. Despite the interruption, the team, which was comprised mostly of artists, still completed the game in 14 months.

Considering its strong artistic direction, it doesn't seem surprising that the ratio of artists to designers was so high with *WipeOut*. Of course, Psygnosis wasn't entirely responsible for coming up with *WipeOut*'s strong aesthetic, as it would enlist the help of acclaimed graphic design studio The Designers Republic (tDR) to sharpen its vision for the game.

Originally hired just to design *WipeOut*'s box art, tDR went on to have a bigger role in its development after key artist Lee Carus (now art director for Sony's Studio Liverpool) spotted a fax from the company and liked the design of the company's header. Splashing it across the side of one of *WipeOut*'s ships in the game's intro to see how it looked, he and the team were in agreement that it suited *WipeOut* perfectly. From



FILE UNDER: ADRENALIN RUSH

that moment, as Carus tells it, “tDR became more heavily involved.”

Of course, a futuristic racing game needed a fitting soundtrack, and for this the team hit all the right notes. A mixture of well-known and up-and-coming dance and electronic artists contributed music to its soundtrack, including the likes of Orbital and Leftfield. Any gaps were filled in with a collection of brilliant compositions by acclaimed Psygnosis musician Tim Wright (aka CoLD SToRAGE).

While today licensed high-quality music tracks can be heard in everything from *FIFA* to *Tony Hawk's*, at the time of *Wipeout*'s development the games industry's relationship with the music business was still very much in its infancy. *Wipeout*'s success, and also that of the popular CD soundtrack that sprung from it, proved the two industries could be mutually beneficial to one another. Kids purchase both videogames and music, and so a good game can offer musicians a captive audience. Similarly, a videogame, particularly a racing game, could be enhanced with a banging soundtrack.

Released in 1995, *Wipeout* is notable for being the first non-Japanese game released for the PlayStation. It was also a launch game for the machine in Europe, sharing shelves with the likes of *Rapid Reload*, *Jumping Flash!*, *Battle Arena Toshinden* and Namco's anticipated *Ridge Racer* home conversion. *Wipeout*'s combat racing and sci-fi setting worked in its favour. Indeed, had it been a ‘pure’ racer, it may well have been forced to inhale Namco's dust come launch.

» *Wipeout 2097* was a great follow-up that ironed out many of the gripes fans had with *Wipeout*. The difficulty was smoothed out and the handling improved.

But *Wipeout* was very much a game for its time, and this was also a contributing factor to the success it enjoyed. Its appearance on an exciting new 32-bit console and the popular club and dance culture of the period undoubtedly helped push *Wipeout* to the huge popularity and success it saw, further assisted by a canny marketing campaign that saw PlayStation booths installed in nightclubs all across the country. *Wipeout*, of course, was a perfect dance partner.



Though *Wipeout* was certainly a strong debut for a new racing franchise, and an appropriate showcase for the PlayStation's audio and visual capabilities, it wasn't perfect. Its sensitive steering mechanics and punishing collision detection, which caused your ship to stop dead in its tracks, combined to make a pretty unforgiving racer, particularly on later circuits.

This was something that didn't go unnoticed by the team when creating the sequel, *Wipeout 2097* (aka *Wipeout XL*). “The original *Wipeout* was very punishing on the user,” says Studio Liverpool's Graeme Ankers, game director for *Wipeout 2048*. “On *2097*, Stewart Sockett did a great job working with the designers to improve the wing-tip collisions, and irritating weapons were removed – this really opened the game up and the additional speed classes made the game a little more accessible and a lot more skill-based at faster (Phantom) speeds.”



But there was one other way the team sought to improve the experience. In the original, a lot of the weapons and power-ups could almost be regarded as *Mario Kart* equals: Mines were essentially Bananas, Rockets were Green Shells, and Missiles were Red Shells. For *Wipeout 2097*, as Graeme explains, this was addressed by adding more imaginative weapons.

“All of the weapons were revisited on *2097*. Rockets were beefed up, rear-firing missiles were added, and the plasma bolt, minigun (only accessible as a cheat) and quake were added by Chris Roberts, who was working on the weapons at the time. Quake was quite an obvious one because the track has such a simple structure on PS1 it was easy to manipulate the geometry to produce the quake effect, so the idea came from the way the track was made rather than from any specific design.”

Offering a more creative array of weapons, dropping any that proved unpopular and improving those that were well loved, *2097* enhanced both sides of *Wipeout*'s core gameplay. And to complement the refined weaponry, and give each a sense of unique worth, crafts were fitted with destructible shields and could be eliminated from races. Of course, this also worked against players as they had to be conscious of their own craft taking too much damage and being retired from the race. This was offset somewhat by the inclusion of pit stops, which allowed players to replenish shields but at the cost of losing time.

For *2097*'s design, Psygnosis reteamed with tDR, and the success of the first title meant that soundtrack contributions came from more revered dance artists, including The Prodigy, The Future Sound Of London, and The Chemical Brothers. As a result of the popular changes, tweaks and refinements made, *2097* is regarded as the pinnacle of the series by many fans. It certainly marks the moment the franchise edged from *Super Mario Kart*'s slipstream, found its own

Work Buy Play Die Reborn



The Designers Republic was responsible for *Wipeout*'s strong design direction, and as such it could be argued it was as much a contributor to the franchises' success as Psygnosis. Based in Sheffield, tDR was established by Ian Anderson in 1986 to originally design posters for a band he was managing. The studio's success grew, particularly in the Nineties, though its strong brand of graphic design, which combined ironic messages and hyper-consumerism with minimalist and constructivist art influences. It brought tDR to the attention of large corporations such as Coca-Cola and Adidas as well as notable British bands including Supergrass and Pulp. In the field of games, tDR has also worked with the likes of Gremlin Interactive, DMA/Rockstar Games and Electronic Arts.

But its most notable collaboration was with Psygnosis on the *Wipeout* series, which came about after tDR was hired to design the box art for the first game and then invited to have a lot more creative input. Despite its success in 2009 tDR was forced to close its doors. Speaking to *Creative Review* in January 2009, Anderson explained that the company had become insolvent due to a number of factors, but said tDR ‘would go forward’. The studio has since been connected with a number of design projects for Warp Records.



» *Wipeout* was a fantastic showcase for Sony's grey box, and embraced the club and dance culture of the time.

The Chronology of WipeOut

A timeline of WipeOut's anti-gravity racing leagues



» The franchise has always served to show off the power and function of the machine it's running on, it's particularly evident in *WipeOut 2048*.

identity and became an iconic racing franchise in its own right.

A sign of how popular the series had become, Psygnosis worked on an exclusive *WipeOut* sequel for the N64. It was essentially a meshing of *WipeOut* and *WipeOut 2097*, featuring slightly tweaked mirrored tracks from those two games, but dressing them up in new names and locations. *WipeOut 64* also marked the series debut for split-screen multiplayer and the popular Challenge Mode, which allowed players to compete in three different event classes which comprised: Race (place high), Battle (destroy rival racers) and Time Trial (finish in the fastest time).



The next PlayStation instalment was *Wip3out*, released elsewhere originally as *WipeOut 3*, though it was also re-released as *WipeOut 3* in 2000. Its original European box art is telling of Psygnosis' and tDR's intent for the look and design of the game. The cover image depicts a white stretch of track with the anti-grav crafts distinguishable only by a few coloured shapes. At a quick glance, it seems like nothing more than a nice bit of minimalist artwork, until you take a closer look and realise that you're actually looking at a brand new game in a popular PlayStation franchise.

A similar thing can be said of the game itself. Marking the last PlayStation instalment in the series, *Wip3out* was another high-scoring entry, but was criticised for not breaking new ground, something Graeme feels was undeserved. "*Wip3out* criticism is never merited. With each new iteration comes a desire from the team to



WipeOut 2048
Takes place: 2048
AG racing league: ARGC
1st season
Number of teams: 5



WipeOut
Takes place: 2052
AG racing league: F3600
Number of teams: 4



WipeOut 2097
Takes place: 2097
AG racing league: F5000
Number of teams: 4



WipeOut 64
Takes place: 2098
AG racing league: F5000
Number of teams: 5



Wip3out
Takes place: 2116
AG racing league: F7200
Number of teams: 8



WipeOut Fusion
Takes place: 2160
AG racing league: F9000
Number of teams: 8



WipeOut Pure
Takes place: 2197
AG racing league: FX300
Number of teams: 8



WipeOut HD
Takes place: 2205
AG racing league: FX350
Number of teams: 12



WipeOut Pulse
Takes place: 2207
AG racing league: FX400
Number of teams: 12



"Wip3out looks like nothing more than a nice bit of minimalist artwork, until you take a closer look"



FILE UNDER: ADRENALIN RUSH

take it to the next level. In the case of *Wip3out*, Nicky Westcott got control and it was the first title out of the new Leeds Studio.

"They were very design oriented and wanted to break it down to its most minimal. The relationship with The Designers Republic was at its height and Mike from The Designers Republic loves to keep things simple. It was a bold approach considering CG was still maturing – everyone was trying to go brighter and bolder – they took a step back and gave us pure design, which worked well given the systems constraints. You couldn't get anything more from the PS1 – so why try? Rather than try anything obvious and new, they stripped it back to what they thought *WipEout* was all about."

Wip3out, despite an erratic difficulty spike, marked another jump up in the quality of the series, although admittedly not as dramatic a leap as with *2097*. *Wip3out* introduced a number of ideas that even elevated it above *2097* in some ways. The most noticeable of which being its visuals; as Greg points out, the approach taken by tDR and the in-house design team was to keep things simple. The teams, realising they would struggle to squeeze any more visual grunt from the PS1 therefore decided to embellish the strong design philosophy of the original, resulting in arguably the best-looking episode in the PlayStation trilogy. It was also one of the few PlayStation games that could be enjoyed in glorious high-definition.

In addition to a few new weapons – notably the Energy Drain and Forcewall – a second speed boost ability was added. Accessible at any point during a race by spending your craft's shield reserve, it provided a fantastic risk-and-reward mechanic. *Wip3out* featured the popular Challenge Mode from *WipEout 64*, and also introduced Eliminator, a last-one-standing deathmatch that could be played by either two players over split-screen, or, by using a cheat, four-players via link-up using a single disc. *2097* supported link-up mode, but required players have two copies of the game. *Wip3out* also marks the final *WipEout* game to have creative input from tDR.

When Sony announced its successor to the PlayStation, a *WipEout* title on the console was



» The team attempted something different with *Fusion*, widening the tracks and making them noticeably more elaborate than previous iterations.



» As well as the PlayStation, *WipEout* also graced the Sega Saturn and PC. The Saturn version (released in 1996) is slightly smoother than the PS version, but lacks particle effects.

"We exploit everything, and we're not just ticking boxes, we do it in a way that's right for our game"

a given. During the interim period between the release of *Wip3out* and the PS2, Psygnosis, which was purchased by Sony prior to the launch of the PlayStation, was renamed SCE Studio Liverpool and the Psygnosis name and Roger Dean's iconic barn owl were both retired.

WipEout Fusion marked a noticeable shift in the series. Good Design was brought in to create the in-game advertisements and menus in the game, and there was a bigger emphasis on weapon use too. Ship upgrades made their first appearance, tracks were noticeably wider and free-form sections added. Arguably the most popular new addition was Zone Mode, which saw players holding their nerve in a tense endurance race in which their craft would gradually increase in speed with each lap.

"We wanted to make new game modes that kept you hypnotised by the game and were super quick – something that you needed to play without wasting time blinking!" Graeme explains, when we ask him where the idea for the mode came from. "As ever we experimented with a few ideas, but Zone Mode was clearly special. We evolved it over the years, with tweaks to the rules, new track graphics and more recently, changing tracks based on your Zone level." Sadly, despite attempts at shaking up the formula, *Fusion* wasn't as well received as previous iterations. And the disappointing reaction it received affected the team's approach to subsequent *WipEout* games.

"The team back then were quite frustrated by it. As a near launch title, it should be a given that the game is primarily a showcase for what is possible on a new platform. We tried very hard to create environments that were more than just the typical trench. The lap times were longer, the tracks more elaborate, but in many instances that wasn't judged to be a good thing. It made us step back from trying anything new with the tracks after that. Something we've rectified in *WipEout 2048*, as it happens."



The second *WipEout* game to be a launch title for a Sony console was *WipEout Pure*, this time on the Sony PSP. This release marked the first portable iteration of the franchise so far, and would pave the way for more to come. A hypnotic experience that had previously only been designed for the big(ish) screen, we asked Graeme how difficult it was to condense *WipEout's* gameplay onto a portable.

"The simple nature of *WipEout's* core DNA meant it translated easily to a handheld," says Graeme. "We just made sure that races didn't last too long and that we could allow the player to save regularly, to help with the 'short bursts of play' nature of a hand-held device."

And was the pressure on to get the game ready for the launch? "We decided to do a new version of *WipEout* for the launch of PSP a long time before we got any PSP development kits. We knew things like screen size, aspect ratio and roughly how powerful the PSP was going to be, so instead of waiting for kits, we started making, running and testing the game on PC.

"We played it via a DualShock 2 to PC converter, and got most of our tracks and handling sorted before the kits even arrived, so we were ahead of the game. By time the kits came in, it didn't take us long to get the game running on them. We found we had to tweak a few things to tailor it more to the PSP's form factor, but there was very little wasted from the PC development that had been carried out."

WipEout Pure was an impressive showcase for Sony's new handheld, and its magazine scores reflected that. As its title implies, *Pure* marked a



RACING BY DESIGN - THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF WIPEOUT

wipeinfluences

We examine in more detail the games said to have influenced Wipeout



F-Zero

■ Nintendo's anti-grav racing series is perhaps *Wipeout*'s biggest racing rival, owing to a comparably-sized fan base and garnering a similar level of success, though *F-Zero* has a comic book aesthetic, and there are no weapons to use.



Powerdrome

■ Michael Powell's *Powerdrome* was another big influence on *Wipeout*, but not in the way some might think. It was seen by Burcombe as 'how not to make a *Wipeout* game', referring to the games fiddly handling as being an issue.



Infestation

■ One of the more subtle influences is this 3D wireframe sci-fi adventure game with an *Alien*-style premise. Jim Bowers worked as graphic artist on this game as well, and there's undoubtedly a connection to be made with *Wipeout*.



Matrix Marauders

■ Another Jim Bowers joint, *Matrix Marauders* is the spark that set *Wipeout* into motion, and also influenced the ship design too. You can clearly see this in the game's intro (seen here). See, looks just like a FEISAR craft.



Super Mario Kart

■ *Wipeout*'s combat-infused racing and randomised weapon pads were inspired by the classic SNES kart racer. *Wipeout*'s lead designer Nick Burcombe was a big fan, and wanted to channel its brilliance into the game.

return to the simple, uncomplicated racing action of early *Wipeout* titles; pitting was removed and the tracks made shorter and less elaborate. *Pure* was also the first in the series to feature DLC. Allowing fans to expand their game via new tracks, vehicles and artwork, it rounded off an impressive portable debut for the franchise.

This was followed up with the PSP sequel *Wipeout Pulse*, which was later converted to PS2. *Pulse* can be seen as something of a fusion of past games, in that it featured many of the best modes of previous entries in the series, including the popular Eliminator and Zone Modes. Some of the notable things it added included a mirror mode, and on-rails track sections that took players around tight corners and through rollercoaster style sections without their craft bouncing around the track like R2-D2 in a magnet factory.

In this current generation there have been two releases in the franchise to date. *WipeoutHD* kicked things off and marked the first digital entry in the series. It also saw the team revisit classic tracks from *Pure* and *Pulse* and remaster them in stunning high-definition, something which worked incredibly well. This was perceived to be a fairly straightforward porting process by the team, but in reality required much more work than was originally first anticipated.

"From an art perspective we were just going to port the game assets from the PSP to the PS3, however we soon realised that when viewed in 1080p the quality of these assets didn't look good enough," Graeme explains. "Geometry, textures, materials and lighting all needed their resolution and quality to be increased by around x10, often more. This led to a complete reworking of each racetrack, environment, vehicles, animation and lighting, using the original PSP version as a block-out guide. The essence of each track remained



» *Wipeout 3* would mark the final *Wipeout* game to have design partnership with The Designers Republic. The relationship lasted four years.

but the end result was a far richer, complex and visually stunning experience for the player."

The recently released *Wipeout 2048* is the latest game in the franchise. A prequel for the franchise and a launch title for the Sony Vita, like *Pure*, it makes impressive use of the console's capabilities, taking full advantage of the machine. Over the years, the *Wipeout* teams have viewed each entry in the franchise as a vehicle to really demonstrate the capability of the hardware it appears on. This has never been more evident than with *Wipeout 2048*, which practically leaves no stone unturned in Vita's oversized rock garden of controls and functions.

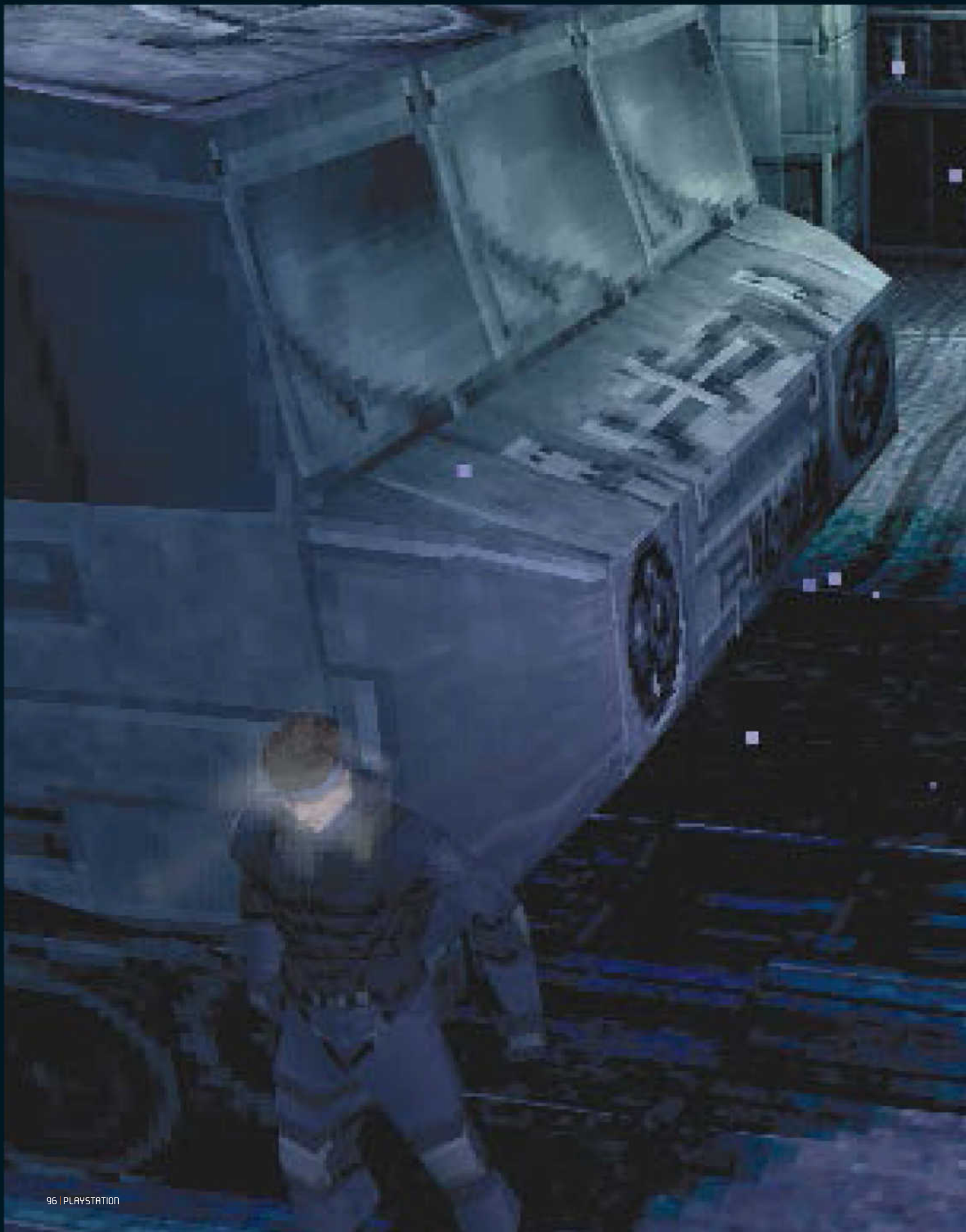
"*Wipeout* is very distinct, nothing else really looks, sounds or even plays like it. *Wipeout* is always a show-piece for the hardware it's running on, regardless of what hardware that is. We always show off what can be done with a new piece of kit by utilising as much of it as we can. *Wipeout 2048* uses pretty much everything the Vita can do – buttons, sticks, tilt, touch,



» There's never been a bad *Wipeout*, a testament to the team's desire to ensure each entry takes the series forward.

cameras, network, near... we exploit everything, and we're not just ticking boxes, we do it in ways that are right for our game. That's why it's a show-piece for Vita."

Each new iteration of *Wipeout* reveals a developer driven by both the desire to not disappoint fans and also to build on past games. But its strong design direction and blend of combat and racing may have been both a blessing and a curse. As each new instalment looks and feels similar, so the subtle tweaks and refinements to the formula are most visible to and therefore appreciated by hardcore fans. The series is, however, one of Sony's most enduring racing franchises and is still arguably the best future racing series out there. It's a pity then that the *Wipeout* story currently finishes on a bum note, due to the closure of Studio Liverpool in 2012. The spirit of *Wipeout* lives on thanks to the likes of *Formula Fusion* (a recent Kickstarter success) and *Redout*, but it's not the same. Here's hoping Sony kickstarts the franchise sooner rather than later...



Metal Gear Solid

SNAKE? SNAAAAAAAAAAAAAKEEEEEEEEE!

RETROREVIVAL



» PLAYSTATION » KONAMI » 1998

For many, the name Metal Gear Solid is as synonymous with the PlayStation brand as *Tomb Raider*, *Gran Turismo* and *Final Fantasy*.

Though the franchise was already well established before the 32-bit game, the power of the PlayStation let Hideo Kojima take the series in a bold new direction.

This in part is mainly due to the excellent voiceover from David Hayter and the rest of the cast. Unlike many actors of the time, they simply assumed the role they were asked to play was as important as they'd receive for any normal movie and they acted accordingly. It's still a little hammy in places, but it's a world away from the likes of *Resident Evil* and many other talkies of the time and helps *Metal Gear Solid* feel like an interactive movie.

Then of course there are the well-realised stealth components, with Kojima building on the mechanics of his earlier MSX games and taking full advantage of the PlayStation's many buttons - expanding Snake's abilities and allowing him access to all sorts of cool weapons and gadgets as a result. Breaking the fourth wall, creating genuine three-dimensional bosses and delivering stunningly cinematic cutscenes via the in-game engine were just a few of the many things that made Snake's adventure such a joy to play and it cemented Kojima as a developer to watch.

Critically acclaimed upon release, it went on to sell over 6 million copies and helped turn Kojima into one of gaming's most famous developers. It even received an enhanced update for Nintendo's GameCube, complete with *Metal Gear Solid 2* gameplay mechanics and ridiculous over-the-top cutscenes. *Metal Gear Solid* wasn't the most original of games (Kojima borrowed heavily from both pop culture and his own earlier titles) but that didn't stop it from being an essential addition to any PlayStation owner's library. ★

Minority Report

CLASSIC GAMES
YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

PLAYSTATION

With over 4000 games released in the console's lifespan, there was a lot of games that were forgotten. Jonny Dimaline tries to fix that injustice and give some of those games a chance in the spotlight

SLAP HAPPY RHYTHM BUSTERS

DEVELOPER: POLYGON MAGIC ■ YEAR: 2000

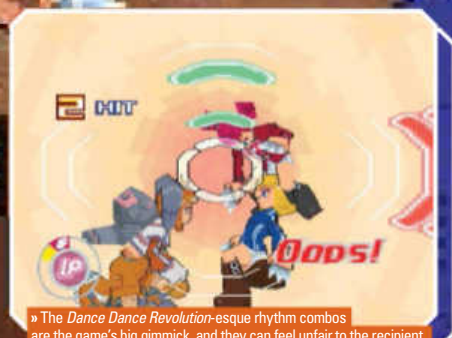
■ On first sight, it's clear to anyone that *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* is an amazing looking game, easily among the top ten great looking games for the PlayStation, in fact. This is mainly thanks to the excellent graffiti-punk aesthetic that permeates every part of it, from the characters designs and stages, right down to the menus and comic strip loading screens. There are very bright colours, and a kind of 'chunkiness' to everything that makes the game and its world radiate a feeling of energetic fun. The game that this style is often associated with is the Dreamcast's *Jet Set Radio*. Amazingly, Sega's game and *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* were actually released in Japan on the very same day.

The character designs are all very appealing and mostly manage to

avoid being variations on generic fighting game stereotypes, with the only exception being the very Chun Li-esque chinese kung fu fighter, Mia. Among them there's Vivian and Roxy, two short girls who count as a single character that take turns riding on each other's backs and throwing each other at their opponents. There's also Trash, who is some kind of rockstar binman, and Oreg, a sort of enormous man/taxi hybrid. Though the character designs are visually original, there are a few concepts that seem borrowed from other games, such as the androgynous Garia and her big floating sword



» The developers definitely never felt any need to hold back on this game's colour palettes.



» The *Dance Dance Revolution*-esque rhythm combos are the game's big gimmick, and they can feel unfair to the recipient.



» Garia throws her big sword around in a style not dissimilar to Donovan from the *Darkstalkers* games.



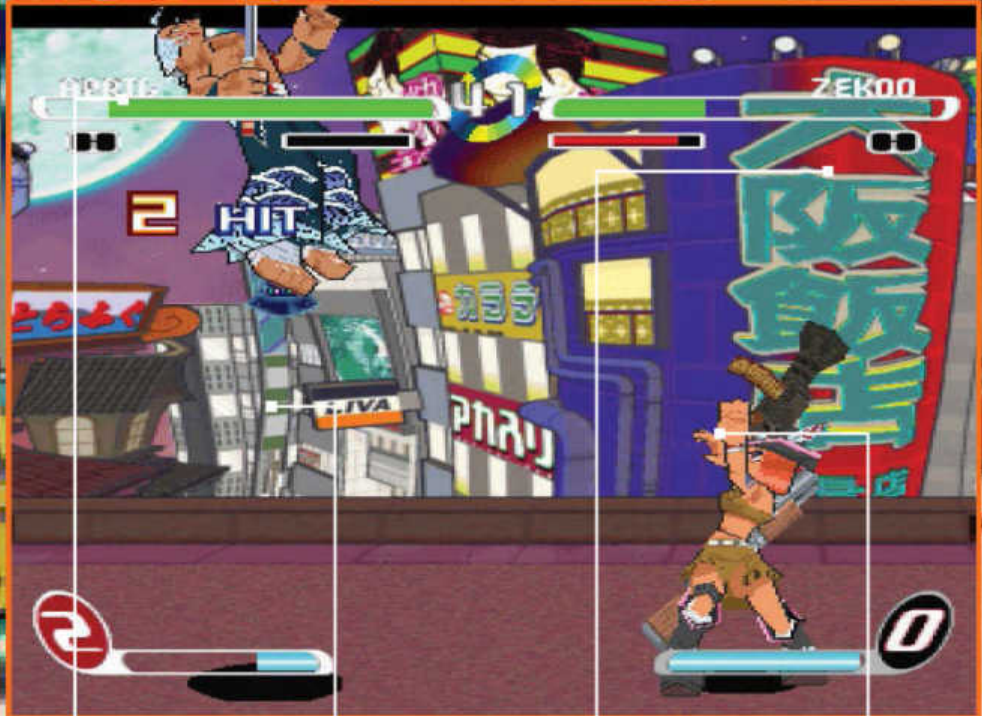
» With the game's cartoon style, even fighting a chainsaw-wielding giant in a butcher's shop looks like fun!

being reminiscent of *Darkstalkers'* Donovan, and another character, a graffiti artist named Tomtom who can summon living graffiti art that looks a lot like the 'Stands' present in *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*.

The big gameplay gimmick of *SHRB* is that, along with the typical super moves that have been in almost every fighting game since *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. Each character can, when their super meter is completely full, activate a rhythm combo, that temporarily turns the game into a miniature version of *Dance Dance Revolution*, with the aggressor matching button presses to arrows on-screen to cause more damage. The downside of this is that once it begins, the defending player can't really do much except hope that the other player has poor timing. Despite that, though, we're surprised that it's a concept that hasn't really been used in other fighting games before or since. Rhythm combos aside, the fighting in *SHRB* is generally a lot of fun. Hits are satisfyingly crunchy, combos are simple enough to put together and the general over the top, super-colourful look to everything makes every fight look like a pretty exciting cartoon, with the excellently modelled and textured graphics doing an excellent job of sneakily hiding the low polygon count. This is a game that wouldn't look entirely out of place on Sega's Dreamcast, it looks that good.

You can probably already guess this, but *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* is a game you should definitely try to get a hold of, should the opportunity arise. It's fun, it looks great and it's pretty unique – which is a rarity in the fighting game genre.

IN DEPTH



SUPER METER

■ Regular super moves only cost one bar overall, but filling up all three segments allows use of the game's trademark *Dance Dance Revolution*-esque Rhythm Combos.

UNIQUE STYLE

■ A large part of the game's appeal is its looks and art style, both the backgrounds and the characters have a heavily stylised, urban aesthetic to them.

VARIED CHARACTERS

■ The game's roster eschews the typical martial artist, with characters ranging from cowgirls to pairs of twins and a homeless man's dog.

GREAT SOUND

■ Obviously, with the gimmick it has, *SHRB* has an upbeat soundtrack to match, but it's no slouch in sound design with solid and meaty-sounding punches and kicks.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



RAGUKA KIDS

NINTENDO 64

■ Another quirky and colourful fighting game with a graffiti-inspired aesthetic, though it is childish chalk drawings rather than spray-painted urban art in this one. It's also one of the N64's very few 2D games, let alone 2D fighting games. Amazingly, it somehow managed to get an EU release, too!



JET SET RADIO

DREAMCAST

■ Although it's not a fighting game, Sega's classic was obviously drawing from the same pool of inspiration as *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters*, in terms of its looks, its setting and its music. It's also a much-beloved classic to pretty much everyone who ever played it, too. Check out the cool sequel as well on Xbox.



DRAGLADE

NINTENDO DS

■ Although taking a more traditional anime influence for its aesthetic, *Draglade* does have a similar rhythm-based special moves gimmick with *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters*, with the extra addition of some RPG elements thrown into the mix. An interesting little effort that's worth tracking down.

Minority Report

FOX JUNCTION

■ DEVELOPER: TRIPS ■ YEAR: 1998

■ **WITH ITS DIVERSE** range of robot-inhabited environments seemingly abandoned by mankind, all depicted with a great looking combination of sprites and low-poly 3D, it can't be denied that *Fox Junction* is an absolutely beautiful game to feast your eyes upon. But, unfortunately, since it's such an obscure title, with only a tiny cult following drawn in by the game's looks and atmosphere, there's scant information on the internet, or anywhere else for that matter, about how its meant to be played.

All that's currently known is that you play as a young wanderer in this apparently empty world, travelling from place to place – and those places are beautiful and varied, from wind-swept deserts, to standing stone-littered plains, from glowing crystal caves to cosy villages with constellations marked out in the night skies above. Eventually, you'll notice that a tower in the distance is not just a background decoration, but has a fixed position, and can actually be reached.

This is as far as anyone has gotten, on the English-speaking internet, at least. Though a few people have managed to reach the tower without meeting their unseemly end at the hands of the various robots that litter the stages, none have managed to get inside it, or figure out the requirements for doing so, or even found out that entering said tower is the actual goal of the game or not.

If you're lucky enough to find a copy (though it doesn't tend to fetch high prices, *Fox Junction* doesn't turn up for sale often), and you want to play something that is utterly unique and mysterious, we would say that *Fox Junction* is definitely worth taking a chance on.



MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» CYBER ORG

■ DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **Squaresoft did a** lot of branching out into genres it hadn't bothered with on the PlayStation, and *Cyber Org* is part of that experiment. It mixes elements of beat-'em-ups, action-RPGs and even roguelikes. You take a team of agents with varied abilities through a series of space stations. It was never going to set the world on fire, but *Cyber Org* is a nice little game, and it's a shame it never came to the west.



» SUPER ROBOT SHOOTING

■ DEVELOPER: MINATO GIKEN
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **There are a** few games on the PlayStation that seem like they existed to provide a substitute for games on Sega's consoles, like for *Gunstar Heroes* there's *Rapid Reload*, and for *Space Harrier* there's *Super Robot Shooting*. You pick from one of a few robots and blast through stages. Each stage is themed, and you can change robots between stages: good news for fans of thematic accuracy.



» EDGE OF SKYHIGH

■ DEVELOPER: MICRONET
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **It's clear that** *Edge Of Skyhigh* was a labour of love for its developers, and that love was aimed at *Afterburner II*. You fly a jet – which can be transformed into a giant robot – and you lock-on to flying enemies, just like *Afterburner*. But now, the sprite scaling of Sega's classic is replaced with texture mapped 3D, and there's more of a sci-fi theme to the proceedings, with stages having the player shoot down giant monsters.



» MAGICAL DROP F

■ DEVELOPER: SAS SAKATA
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **Although it is** unheard of over here, *Magical Drop F* is the pinnacle of the puzzle series. It makes a few tweaks to the core game, like penalty orbs dropping in individual columns rather than solid rows, and though the changes seem small, they add up to a much better game. The graphics also see an improvement with more colours and animation, and there's the addition of a RPG mode, with equipment and *Magical Drop* battles.

SPEED POWER GUNBIKE

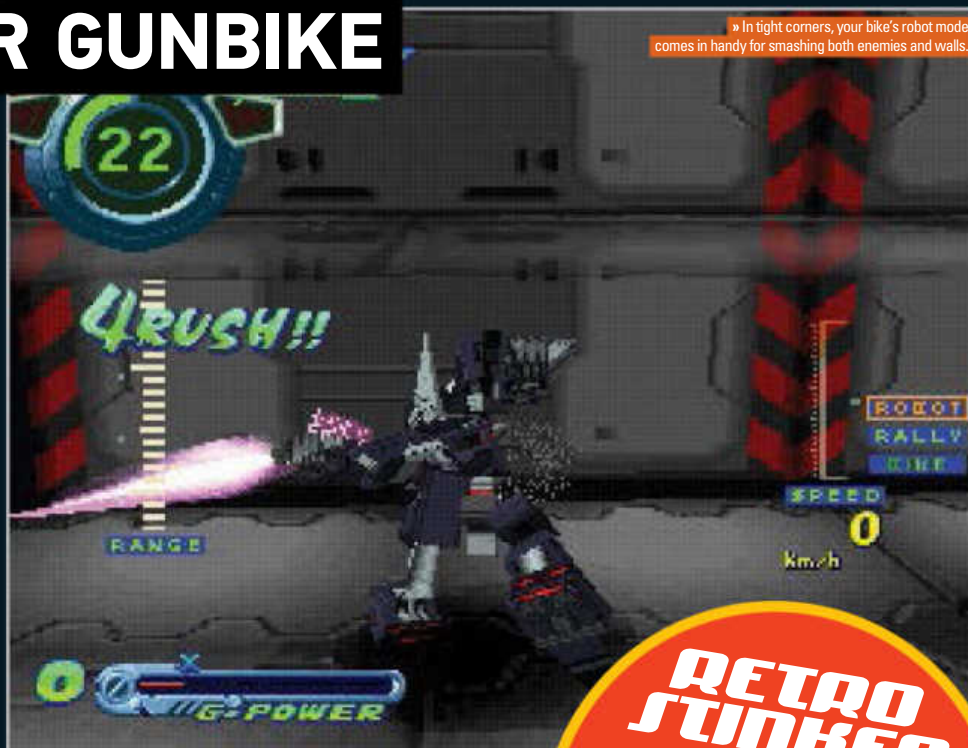
■ DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES ■ YEAR: 1998

■ **THIS GAME IS** a bit of an odd one: on first examination, it's a striking title with a cool concept, but a clunky, awkward execution that's no fun to play. Fortunately it's a game that rewards perseverance, as it gets more fun to play the more that you get used to its odd controls and mechanics. Also, it was made by Inti Creates, who are more associated with excellence in 2D platformers, like the *Mega Man Zero* series, or, more recently, *Azure Striker Gunvolt*.

The main focus of the game is riding at speed down long, futuristic and enemy-littered roads reminiscent of Eighties and Nineties cyberpunk anime, such as *Akira* or *Cyber City Oedo 808*. The vehicles you do this riding in/on are motorbikes that can transform at will into slower but easier to steer buggies, or very slow power armour that's much better suited to combat.



» The transforming aspects of *Speed Power Gunbike*, ensures it stands apart from other racers.



» In tight corners, your bike's robot mode comes in handy for smashing both enemies and walls.

When you first start playing, you'll bump into walls and other objects, running out of time by getting lost and generally having a bad time of it. If you make the effort to practice, though, *Speed Power Gunbike* feels great to play. It's almost like some kind of strange, less forgiving alternate universe *Sonic* game that wanted to make the player earn the feeling of speed and freedom.

RETRO SLINKER
» CHAOS BREAK

■ DEVELOPER: EON ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **Loosely based on** the arcade game *Chaos Heat*, this replaces the pure action of that game with a poor man's *Resident Evil*, with lots of tedious corridor traipsing and even an unskippable sudoku puzzle.



» GERMS NERWARETA MACHI

■ DEVELOPER: KEJ
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **With a large** 3D city to navigate, and plenty of buildings to explore and people to talk to, *Germs* is a game that was ahead of its time. Although it was released to no fanfare or acclaim back in 1999, it was rediscovered and gained a tiny cult following thanks to its aesthetic of low-poly buildings, faceless characters and sultry music.



» EXTRA BRIGHT

■ DEVELOPER: TO ONE
■ YEAR: 1996

■ **Upon first seeing** *Extra Bright's* narrow, twisty tracks, you could easily mistake it for a futuristic racing game in the *F-Zero* vein, but it's actually a pretty slow paced on-rails shooter. It's a simple one, too, since you can't even move vertically, only side to side. *Extra Bright* looks great, though, all the models are nicely designed, looking both futuristic and cuddly at the same time, with rounded edges and pastel colours.



» KURUKURU MARUMARU

■ DEVELOPER: JAPAN ART MEDIA
■ YEAR: 2001

■ **Despite its silly** sounding name and colourful, cartoony graphics, *Kurukuru Marumaru* is actually a harsh driving game. It has a control system that uses every button on the PlayStation controller, having the player not only steering, controlling their speed and changing gears, but also starting the engine, using the hand brake and even turning on indicators before turning.



» PET IN TV

■ DEVELOPER: SCEI
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **Unlike most of** the games featured here, *Pet In TV* did get a release in Europe though without much fanfare. You guide a weird robot around, trying to teach it about the world. The ultimate goal is to build up its intellect so it can solve puzzles with no player input. It's an interesting concept, executed poorly. 'Guide' is an apt word, as you don't have direct control over your pet, as you can only make suggestions.

DIE HARD

TRILOGY



Die Hard Trilogy was the quirky PlayStation hit that successfully melded old-fashioned arcade action with new-fangled 3D tech. Martyn Carroll talks to the guys at Probe Entertainment who took all-American hero John McClane and placed him in a very British game

IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: FOX INTERACTIVE

» DEVELOPER:
PROBE ENTERTAINMENT

» PLATFORM:
PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC

» RELEASED: 1996

» GENRE: 3D FILM TIE-IN



The blood on the windscreen was Simon Pick's idea. *Die Hard Trilogy's* lead programmer and co-designer was responsible for that glorious, over-the-top moment that everyone who's played the game will always remember. You're tearing around New York City in the *Die Hard With A Vengeance* portion of the game when your yellow cab mounts the sidewalk and ploughs into screaming pedestrians. Bodies fly and blood splatters, and your vision is momentarily obscured until the windscreen wipers wash the red stuff away. "Sorry, pal!" quips McClane in typical deadpan fashion.

"Simon came up with some really crazy stuff," says James Duncan, who

worked on the game as a 3D artist. "He would just come in each day with madcap ideas involving explosions or people on fire – you'll notice that there are a lot of people on fire in the game. I still, to this day, don't know how we got away with some of the stuff like the blood on the windscreen."

Simon is happy to take credit: "The blood on the windscreen was the low point, or the high point, depending on which way you look at it."

Retro Gamer met up with Simon and James in a pub in Guildford. The pair work nearby – Simon at Electronic Arts and James at Lionhead – and they were both happy to spend their lunch hours chatting about the game that has opened

lots of doors for them in the industry. *Die Hard Trilogy* was actually James's first published game following spells at Digital Integration and NovaLogic, while Simon's softography stretches back to 1984 with the release of *Daredevil Dennis* on the BBC Micro. The self-taught programmer went on to work for The Sales Curve and coded a bunch of Commodore 64 and NES titles before he was invited to join Croydon-based Probe Entertainment in the mid-Nineties.

"Probe boss Fergus McGovern had a number of things that needed developing," reveals Simon, "and one of them was a PlayStation game based on some weird ITV adventure game show. And I said, 'Yeah, I'll do that. It'll

SEGA GAGA

DIE HARD TRILOGY is best known as a PlayStation game, but it was also released on the Saturn and PC. The Saturn version plays like a bit of a dog, and Simon reveals why: "In the previous generation, when you were doing Spectrum and Amstrad games, you could pretty much write the Spectrum version and port it to the Amstrad really easily – you just changed the render code and it all worked. We thought it would be the same with the PlayStation and Saturn, so we said we'd concentrate on the PlayStation version and then worry about the other versions later. Two or three months before the end of the project, these two guys came in and I just said, 'Here's my code, go away and port it.' It was full of PlayStation-isms, and it was the first game I'd written in C and my C code was awful, and it was a real nightmare for them, the poor buggers. It was really slow and choppy as they had to emulate a lot of the hardware, but they managed to do it."



» "One thing that really annoyed me was when *Driver* came out," says Simon. "They had a free roam mode where you could just drive around the city, and I thought, 'Damn it, we should have done that!'"



pay the bills.' About three months into it, ITV canned the show and the game disappeared with it. Fergus said, 'That's gone, I'm afraid, but Fox is asking us about making a *Die Hard* game – are you interested in doing that?' To be honest, at the time I was so into the game show thing that I grudgingly accepted."

Although dozens of people worked on *Die Hard Trilogy*, Simon was at the team's core. He designed and coded the *Die Hard 2* and *Die Hard With A Vengeance* segments and was the overall lead programmer on the project, responsible for everything from the front end to the 3D graphics engine. The *Die Hard* game was designed by Dennis Gustafsson and programmed by Greg Modern. James worked across all three games as a 3D world modeller, which basically involved building the 3D elements that the player gets to shoot, smash up or set fire to.

Work on the game began in early 1994, when the PlayStation was still very much in development and only trusted third-parties were exposed to the new hardware. "We were sent some really

early dev kits," says Simon. "They were enormous, bulky things that were like oversized PCs, and it was called the PSX at that point. For the first six months we didn't see any other PlayStation software at all, because it was all still new and secret. There was a Sony developers' conference that we went to and it was the first time we saw what other people were doing with the hardware. We were terrified going in, thinking that the others would be doing all these amazing things, but luckily everyone was doing the same kind of stuff that we were. Coming onto the PlayStation was really exciting, although it was a bit of a culture shock – there were no sprites! But the fact that you could render so much and do all the 3D stuff was amazing, and I spent the first month or so just seeing how many pixels I could get in an explosion..."

"Simon loves explosions," says James, cutting in.

"I do like explosions!" laughs Simon, and goes on to comment about the 'kitchen sink' nature of the game. "I have a very low boredom threshold, so I'd play

“ There was certainly nothing pretentious about it. It was just a good, fun game ”

JAMES DUNCAN

the game and say, 'This is boring. Let's add some more random stuff and blow it up.' We shoved everything we could think of into the game. Doing that can end up with the game becoming bloated, but it has a certain kind of charm, and I think *Die Hard Trilogy* has that charm. It clearly has no real guiding principles or game design philosophy behind it. If anybody in the team at any point said 'wouldn't it be cool if...' then we'd say 'okay, yeah, fine' and we'd put it in."

"We didn't really have any production documents on the game," adds James. "We just thought things up and went and did them. I guess, if anything, the *Die Hard* movies acted as the game's production documents."

Despite the game being in development at roughly the same time

» "It was particularly funny for us because the enemies had the faces of team members," says James, "so we were shooting people we worked with."



» The *Die Hard 2* section was one of the first PlayStation games to include mouse and lightgun support.



» The main impetus behind the production of *Die Hard Trilogy*, Simon Pick (standing) and Dennis Gustafsson.



DIY DIE HARD

THE GAME IS packed with funny cheats – giving characters daft voices or making everyone look like Probe boss Fergus McGovern, for example – but there's one secret that was no fun whatsoever for *Die Hard 2* level designer Matt Nagy. If you pause the game and press a special button combination – right, up, down, square – you can access the built-in level editor that Matt actually used to map the *DH2* levels. Simon explains: "We didn't have any tools for doing the mapping, and there wasn't a free dev kit available for Matt to use, so we decided to actually map the game using one of those blue debug PlayStations. We built into the *Die Hard 2* engine the level editor, which Matt could use to place objects and enemies, and he mapped the whole game using that. He'd save his work to memory card, which I'd then plug in to my dev kit and pull off the data."

The *DH2* level editor was actually left in the finished game, so anyone can access it and tinker with the maps. "So you can go through the same hell as Matt," laughs James.



» The hidden *Die Hard 2* level editor is exactly the same as the one used in the game's development.

as *Die Hard With A Vengeance*, the plan was always to adapt the three films. Simon reveals that the decision to create three separate games based on each movie was the most obvious – if not the most sensible – decision. "At the time, Probe was also developing *Alien Trilogy*, and that was just one game based on the three films. We were sitting in an early design meeting and I said, 'Why aren't we making three games? It's a trilogy: it should be three games.' We'd never made a 3D game before, and we were guessing it would take about six months to make a game, so that would be three games in 18 months, which

just about fit into our time schedule. It was madness in hindsight, but that's what we decided to do. And Fergus pretty much said, 'Do what you want. We trust you.' Fergus was really good and I think he was caught up in the whole excitement of the thing. I guess the main reason we had so much freedom was because we were in the first generation of 3D games and



» "It's really quite bad," says Simon about the game's blood. "I wouldn't let my eight-year-old boy play it!"



» If the boss's bright red jumper didn't make him stand out, the massive signpost above his head probably did.



» One of the objectives in *DH2* was to prevent hostages from getting mowed down, if you could be bothered.

there was no one else to copy. These days when you're making a game you have to say, 'We're making this and it's kind of like *Grand Theft Auto* with a bit of this thrown in.' It's always references to other games. Back then we were unable to say what it was like, because it wasn't really like anything else."

Even now it's hard to pigeonhole *Die Hard Trilogy*, as it's a collection of three different games. *DH1* is a free-roaming third-person shooter, *DH2* is an on-rails shooter, and *DH3* is an open-city driving game. The constant is that all three feature wanton destruction and a wicked sense of humour.

Inspirations were drawn primarily from coin-op games – *DH2*, in particular, was the team's take on Sega's *Virtua Cop*, as there was a *Virtua Cop* arcade game in the Probe offices that received a lot of play. Designer Dennis Gustafsson, who was unable to join us for our lunchtime chat, provided RG with additional insight via email and singled out a specific arcade game: "We only had one golden rule for the direction of the gameplay: we wanted every aspect of the game to have the action of the arcade classic *Berzerk*. Full-on action from all directions. If we

followed the game script so much the better, but not at the cost of the action. I think we managed to do just that. Everyone got into the spirit of the game and geared *Die Hard Trilogy* towards the crazy, no-holds-barred action title for which it has become famous."

One of the biggest difficulties the team had was taking arcade-style 2D gameplay and making it work in 3D. Breathing life into the characters was particularly tricky, and it involved using some primitive motion capture technology. "We had no idea how to do 3D people," admits Simon. "If you wanted to properly skin polygonal people you could only have about three of them on screen and the game would start to chug. So we came up with this ridiculous 'meatball man' idea, where you had eight or so bits just stuck together – one for the head, one for the body, the arms and legs and so on. Looking at them now, they look terrible, like something out of *Captain Pugwash!* Their heads wobble and there are all these stupid artefacts all over the place."

Using an early digital camera, which Fergus had acquired on a trip to Japan, photos were taken of each team member

FOX FIGHTS BACK

20TH CENTURY FOX had minimal input during the game's development, and only objected if the team added something that had nothing to do with the films. One case in point was the team's original depiction of New York City. Dennis tells the tale: "When the Fox producers saw an early demo of our driving game, the levels had jumpy hills, meandering roads and bendy curves that led into sewers. I remember they were strangely unimpressed by the wild and crazy driving experience that we had going."

When Dennis arrived in New York to snap some location pictures for the game, he soon found out why. "One of the producers, Scott, took me downtown and literally dragged me out into the traffic. We stood in the middle of the street and Scott said 'look' and pointed down the street. I looked. Then he pointed in the opposite direction and said 'look' again. I looked. 'What do you see?' he asked. I replied: 'Straight, wide streets, no curves, no hills, no nothing. Just cars.' Scott nodded, having made his point, and walked off, leaving me to my own devices. The rest of the stay I took hundreds of pictures of all the areas that were to be included in the game."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GOLDEN AXE

SYSTEM: C64, AMIGA, ST
YEAR: 1989

MORTAL KOMBAT (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE,
GAME GEAR, AMIGA
YEAR: 1993

ALIEN TRILOGY

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION,
SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1996



» Even without guns, *Die Hard With A Vengeance* proved to be violent.



» The team rigged an old church with infrared cameras and used them for motion capture.



» Designer Alec Prenter using the grid-based *DH3* level editor to map out New York City.



» This clever visual trick lets you see through walls as you explore Nakatomi Plaza in *DH1*.

and their faces were used to give the meatball men their identities. They weren't allowed to use Bruce Willis's likeness due to licensing costs, so the McClane role went to the folklally challenged Dennis: "They used me, with less and less hair retouched onto my head for each sequel. I was a lot cheaper than Bruce."

The development took between 18 months and two years, and as the release date approached, the team had to clock up the overtime to finish it. "We've probably made it sound like it was really good fun making the game, but towards the end of the project it was really awful," says Simon. "We were working seven-day weeks for at least three months, because it was going to be a Christmas release and we were running late. We really did crunch at the end. We were getting closer to the date when it had to be in shops, and Fox were getting more and more desperate. I believe Fox forced it through Sony's approval process because there were still crash bugs in it when it was released, which was unusual. Sony wasn't really such a big force at the time and I think Fox bullied it a bit to get the game approved."

Getting the game done was sweet for all involved, particularly as there were rumours that they'd been playing second fiddle to the 'other' *Trilogy* in development at Probe. "There was a rivalry between ourselves and the *Alien Trilogy* team," reveals Simon, "and with the imminent sale of Probe to Acclaim, everyone assumed that *Alien Trilogy* was the most likely to succeed. Understandably, Fergus wanted to make *Alien Trilogy* the best it could be to keep Acclaim happy. From our perspective, it often felt like *Alien Trilogy* was the golden child, getting the quality staff and internal plaudits. We didn't know it at the time, but we were known as 'Try Hard' instead of *Die Hard*, because we were just sitting there, trying really hard, not knowing what we were doing. The *Alien Trilogy* team was massive and its game was gorgeous. We were the underdogs, at least until our game was released. And then the world went mad."

"It was crazy," adds James. "It was my first published game and it was a fantastic experience. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. *Die Hard Trilogy* was three solid games, nothing more, but together they sealed the deal."

The game was a critical and commercial smash, and although exact sales figures are not available, it was a multimillion-unit seller and one of the strongest-performing titles during the early years of the PlayStation. Part of its success is surely due to the freedom offered to the team during development.

"It was amazing to have that level of freedom in that creative environment, and being left alone to do whatever we wanted," says James. "It will probably never happen again. It also helped that everyone on the team really liked games – we'd talk about them and play them in our lunchtimes. It really was a game made by gamers. There was certainly nothing pretentious about it. It was just a good, fun game."

"In many ways it was like one of those classic albums you read about," adds Simon. "The right people, the right place, the right time. It just worked."

And, with that, the interview ends and Simon and James return to work for the afternoon. We guess their current videogame projects are somewhat more structured and governed than *Die Hard Trilogy*. And they almost certainly include fewer explosions and people on fire.



evil rises

the story of resident evil

Capcom's Resident Evil series is one of the most famous in videogames, having spawned everything from action figures to Hollywood blockbusters. But the story behind the franchise is more intriguing and fantastical than any of its fictions: it's a story of determination, jealousy, bankruptcy and people pushed to the limit. Steve Burns welcomes you back to the world of survival-horror

Osaka, Japan, early 1996. It was gone three AM in the long abandoned cubicles and halls of Capcom's HQ, but work was by no means finished. Still prowling the corridors was a young Shinji Mikami: director of Capcom's new *Resident Evil* project, drinker of too much beer, and worker of too many hours. With the nascent *Resident Evil* racing to a hugely-pressurised conclusion, Mikami had been doing this for months, attempting to balance not just his own perfectionist expectations but those of Capcom as well. As Mikami and his and his team crunched – not for the first night and not for the last, working 18-hour days and indulging in deskchair chariot races after hours to stay sane – 1994 must've seemed a long time ago.

Then, Mikami had just a handful of licensed Disney games and a scrapped F1 title under his belt. Soon his spirits would be lifted when he was approached by Capcom general

manager Tokuru Fujiwaru, to create a game that could carry on the legacy of *Sweet Home*, Capcom's 1989 NES horror adventure. Mikami was intrigued and agreed, borrowing some of that game's finer touches (the door-opening screens, for example) for Capcom's newest IP: *Biohazard*, or *Resident Evil* in the West thanks to the band Biohazard owning the copyright for the original title. It would tell the tale of playable characters Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine, as well as the rest of the 'STARS' counter-terrorist unit, fighting for their lives in a huge mansion filled with tricks, traps and what would become *Resident Evil*'s trademark bad-science monstrosities, while uncovering the growing conspiracy that shrouded the Umbrella pharmaceutical company's virus research.

Mikami wanted to instil players with fear, and had originally toyed with the idea of a more ▶



► supernatural angle for the horrors found in the Spencer Mansion, like in *Sweet Home*. Eventually, he settled on slightly more grounded approach that suited the paramilitary STARS unit and their fighting abilities.

"I wanted an atmosphere found in the film *Jaws*, where the player was in danger, but still capable of dealing with it," he stated in the book *The True Story Behind Resident Evil*. "In short, I wanted

“I wanted an atmosphere like *Jaws*, where the player is in danger but capable of dealing with it”

the player to make clear decisions while they experienced much fear... pursued not by something supernatural, but something concrete."

From this decision, the rest of the project took shape. *Sweet Home* would provide the basis for the secluded mansion setting and the delightfully wacky, completely ludicrous puzzles that broke up the action. Mikami loved Romero's 'Dead' films, and for him the zombie was the perfect enemy: physical, killable, but capable of projecting the right amount of 'the fear' in the way they endlessly stalked their prey.

Mikami was also fortunate with Fujiwara's timing: 'next generation' consoles such as the PlayStation were on the horizon, and Mikami was grateful of the power they afforded,

stating in *The Birth of Resident Evil* that, "This feeling of anxiety was realised with the assistance of the new generation of consoles (the PlayStation) that helped achieve the remarkable graphics."

New consoles, however, would bring new challenges, and Mikami soon realised that his dream of creating *Resident Evil* in first-person was dead. This limitation would give rise to the famous pre-rendered backgrounds that gave *Resident Evil*

in *The True Story Behind Resident Evil*. Only the interjection of Fujiwara stopped the project from stalling.

Although Mikami had claimed that the interference from above and the exhausting schedule had meant that he had "lost all interest in watching the game go on sale", *Resident Evil* would become a triumph, selling 600,000 units and making Mikami – and the game – big names. Finally, his "moment had come".

Resident Evil had become a phenomenon: George A Romero would go on to write a script for a movie adaptation, and direct a live-action Japanese advert for the game. It was impossible to open a videogame magazine between 1996-98 without reading about it. The hype train wasn't just rolling, it was out of control. *Resident Evil 2* had to be better than good. It had to be perfect.

Things got off to a shaky start in 1996 and nosedived from there. Jun Takeuchi stated in *The True Story Behind Resident Evil* that he wanted to "widen [*Resident Evil*]'s audience". The first *Resident Evil*, by Mikami's own admission, was made to be deliberately difficult, especially in the US, where it was made even tougher in an attempt to thwart the rental market. Mikami shared Takeuchi's ideal for broader audience reach, but also pondered that a member of his team had told him, "It is not that easy to attract a larger audience while not losing sight of the game's essence."

Mikami was burnt out after the first game, and soon found himself kicked upstairs to a producing role, a move that saddened him and

its signature flavour (and also, out of necessity, its terrible controls).

Things would get worse before they got better as the team size fluctuated, the deadline loomed and the pressure intensified. Capcom began to ask serious questions regarding the project. Was it financially viable? Would Capcom be sunk if the game flopped?

'Discontinue *Resident Evil* Project' was suggested by an external consultancy firm. Capcom certainly couldn't afford to go throwing good money after – allegedly – bad. *Resident Evil* was a make-or-break project for the house Hadoukens built. As so often happens in the series, the countdown to self-destruction had begun.

Things got even worse when studio boss Yoshiki Okamoto criticised *Resident Evil*'s controls and design, furiously demanding Mikami "doesn't put Capcom's name to shit like this," as recalled



» Nemesis is a terrifying foe, more intelligent and far more resilient than anything seen up until that point in the series.



would go on to generate friction with new director Hideki Kamiya. To chronicle every step of what transpired in the *Resident Evil 2* project would require more pages than both this magazine and deforestation regulations permit, but there are key touchstones throughout development that crafted it into the experience we have today. First revealed in July 1996, *Resident Evil 2* looked impressive, if evolutionary. The tried-and-tested camera angles were still there; the happy accident of technological limitation that gave *Resident Evil* its moody panoramas and claustrophobic close-ups was still paying off. The outlandish puzzles still featured, breaking up the action nicely. And, of course, the characters still moved like tanks.

Everything else, however, had been kicked up a gear. The new characters (rookie cop Leon Kennedy and the ill-fated biker chick/college student Elza Walker, both caught in the outbreak sweeping Raccoon) weren't just the blank-faced mannequins they were before: now they reacted to damage, their clothes shredding at the teeth and claws of their enemies. Those hallowed steel-blue offices of the early versions would also suffer damage from the upgraded amount of enemies available on screen.

Anticipation grew as players dreamed of pitched battles in the streets of Raccoon City, but behind closed doors tensions were mounting. Mikami, still reeling from Kamiya taking the director's chair, began to attempt to influence the game directly. Worse still, Mikami envisioned the sequel would give closure to the universe, a notion ▶

The Beta Band

A brief look at the many different versions of *Resident Evil*

MORE SO THAN perhaps any other franchise in history, *Resident Evil* is famed for its betas and lost projects, due in part to both Capcom's willingness to change artistic direction and the vast differences between the versions. *Resident Evil 2* and *4* are obviously the most famously revised, but the series also features many little-known entities that are lost to time. Here are some of the most interesting...

Resident Evil

Although *Resident Evil*'s supernatural elements were cut early on, it's rumoured some versions did feature trace elements of this thinking. In one build, the player would pass walls where blood would form messages for the player.

Shockingly, Barry Burton also wasn't in the game to begin with. Instead we got Gelzer, a tank-like behemoth that would hold the ceiling from collapsing on Jill in the shotgun trap room. Elements of his character were eventually moulded into the Barry we all know and love. Another character not to make the cut was Dewey, who was to be a playable character unlocked after finishing the game, described by Mikami as an Eddie Murphy type who would provide comic relief.

Early footage showed Chris fighting the mutated snake Yawn in the shed that leads to the guardhouse. The shed was changed in the final release, and the battle removed, but the two exits on the beta map are still in place in the FMV that introduces the Hunter. In fact, the beast even enters through one of them in the video.



Early images circulated to certain games magazines showed that the game was playable in co-op (as shown at www.unseen64.net). Another build showed players swapping weapons in real time.

Resident Evil 2

Originally, players would run into the support characters. Leon met cop Marvin Branagh and researcher Linda, while Elza had a guy named John and Sherry Birkin.

Resident Evil 3

The opening of *Resident Evil 3* is different in earlier builds. Instead of showing Jill leaving her hotel and bursting onto the streets of Raccoon City, the beta shows a series of images of STARS members arguing with RPD Chief Irons, before showing Jill walking the wrecked streets of Raccoon City.

Resident Evil 4

In the demo for *Resident Evil 4* some unused items that didn't make it to the final cut are still there, including infrared goggles. Another beta shows other items in Leon's inventory, including a fish!

Resident Evil 5

Chris's arms are much smaller than they are in the early

trailers. Considering they're still the size of small nations, that's saying something.

Chris originally had a contextual duck manoeuvre for evading attacking foes, as seen in the first gameplay trailer. This was axed, with Kawata particularly displeased with its removal. It was originally implemented as a prototype, Kawata told us. "But it got removed as we implemented other controls and systems. That was an exciting and powerful gimmick, so I was also disappointed." The art style is also more subdued than in earlier versions. Whereas *Resident Evil 5* was originally going to be high-contrast with deep saturation, a more muted colour scheme was chosen for the final build.



» Despite many gamers' dearest wishes, *Resident Evil 2* was mostly confined to one location.



» *Resident Evil Zero* featured some innovations (the ability to drop items, real-time character swapping) but still slavishly stuck to series conventions.



» How many zombies have we killed in this corridor over the years? Thousands, probably.

► that Okamoto sternly refused. Despite good progress being made on *Resident Evil 2* – the game was set to release in May 1997, and coverage in the games media had been slavering – Mikami pulled the plug, with estimates placing the game at over 60 per cent complete.

Mikami had decried *Resident Evil 1.5*, as it came to be known, for not meeting his high standards. The game's cold, T2-esque lighting and small police station setting didn't have the appropriate feel, and to this end the setting was rewritten externally, starting Capcom's relationship with scriptwriting firm Flagship. Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last, a *Resident Evil* game was going to have to be completely redesigned. Mikami took a back seat and allowed Kamiya to finish the game uninterrupted. Elza Walker morphed into Claire Redfield to establish continuity with the original game, and the Raccoon Police Department became a more Gothic environment.

Capcom apologised for the delay by releasing *Resident Evil: Director's Cut*, as Kamiya and the company crunched to get *Resident Evil 2*

finished. Like Leon, Kamiya was a rookie, and like Leon he'd have to battle to make it out of *Resident Evil 2* in one piece.

Despite the crushing stress, *Resident Evil 2* was starting to come together in a way that 1.5 never could, with Kamiya remarking recently on his Twitter

“It is not that easy to attract a larger audience while not losing sight of the game's essence”

feed that the difference between the two versions was like “heaven and hell”. *Resident Evil 2*'s innovative ‘zapping’ system, where scenarios for Leon and Claire would overlap or intertwine, lending the game replay value, was excellent. The game's action focus was turning it into a rip-roaring slice of entertainment, the same breed as its predecessor but distinctly different. If *Resident Evil* was *Alien*, the mansion the creaking Nostromo, a haunted house, then *Resident Evil 2* was *Aliens*, and

Raccoon City was to be LV-426: this time it was war.

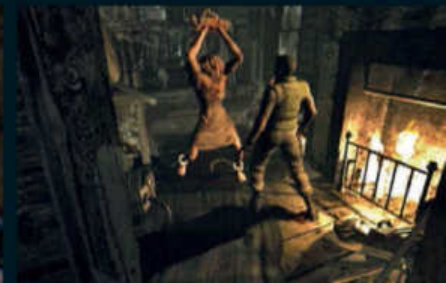
Resident Evil 2 was an instant hit. For Mikami, however, the project would always be tinged with regret.

“My biggest disappointment was that [the higher-ups] made me be a producer, and that I had to step back from actual game

development,” he told 1Up.com.

“When you're a director, you can really create the game you want to create hands-on, whereas when you're the producer you just kind of oversee it, so you kind of have to stand back and watch.”

Resident Evil 2's success was predictable: as the sequel to one of the highest-profile games in PlayStation history it was never going to fail. With *Resident Evil 3*, however, those assurances disappeared quicker than zombie



How remakes SHOULD be done

A brief behind-the-scenes with Capcom's glorious GameCube remake

LONG BEFORE REMAKING old games for new consoles became the business plan du-jour for almost every major publisher, Capcom showed everyone how it should be done with the release of the *Resident Evil* remake in 2002. Using the GameCube's then-superior power, it was produced by Production Studio 4 and directed by Shinji Mikami.

RE5 co-producer Masachika Kawata was on board as well, and recalled to us the personal pressure that the project entailed.

“The decision was made right after finishing *Dino Crisis 2*. I went to work after a vacation and my

boss told me that I was joining the project. I was overworking for years at that time so I was mentally exhausted.

“The environment was severe, so personally I do not have many happy memories in making this. I joined this project as the leader of the background designers, but I did not work as a design leader after this.”

From this pressure, however, Capcom created diamonds. While most modern remakes are simply up-rezzed versions of the old game given a lick of paint (the recently released *Resident Evil 4* HD being an example), Capcom really went to

town on the GameCube remake. The basic tenets were the same – guide Chris and Jill through the mansion, try not to get killed – and even the pre-rendered backdrops remained. However, thanks to the power of Nintendo's console, the game looked truly beautiful, and holds up to this day. The game also added personal defence weapons (grenades and knives that could be used to fend off zombies that had hold of the player), the new Crimson Head zombie that needed to be burned to be truly finished off, and the reinstatement of Trevor's Letters.

For the uninitiated, the letters were meant to serve as an

explanation as to why such a stately mansion has so many bizarre and illogical traps and puzzles. A series of diary entries details the fate of architect George Trevor and his family as they visit Umbrella founder Oswell E Spencer at the estate Trevor designed, and they're a grisly read as Spencer makes sure that he's the only one that knows the secret of the Arklay mansion. Throw in Lisa Trevor – the daughter of George who has been experimented on mercilessly for years and now cannot die – as a sub-boss and you've got a fascinating re-envisioning that deepens and enriches an already brilliant game.

bodies when you leave and re-enter a room in any *Resident Evil* game. Directed neither by Mikami nor Kamiya, for most of its development *Resident Evil 3* wasn't going to be an fully-fledged sequel. Instead it was going to be a side-story, and bore the titles *Resident Evil 2.1* and *Resident Evil 1.9* during development. As ever, Okamoto had a say, re-instating the series to full-sequel status, and production came and went without much of a hitch. Despite the success of the game (it would go on to sell over 3 million copies), it is seen as the black sheep of the series – perhaps more so than even *Resident Evil 0*. Which is perhaps harsh, given it introduced new features such as the dodge move, 'Live Selection' events that enable you to shape your path through the game, and of course Nemesis, the persistent enemy that gives the game its unique *Terminator*-style flavour. *Code Veronica* too was successful, if derivative – reintroducing Wesker, Chris and Claire was a great idea, and the 3D backgrounds the Dreamcast afforded were much appreciated. Interestingly, rumours swirled that *Code Veronica* had actually started life as a PlayStation game before making the leap to the Dreamcast. In an exclusive interview with **Retro Gamer**, *Resi 5* co-producer Masachika Kawata was cagey when asked if this was the case, simply stating "I don't know".

While *Resident Evil 3*, *Code Veronica* and *0* were all good games, they were sidesteps; evolutionary instalments rather than giant leaps forward. For that reason (and also those of time and space) we have opted to concentrate on what was to come. No matter how good the 'classic' gameplay may have been (and *CV* is excellent) many thought the series was simply repeating itself, literally in the case of the *Resident Evil* remake and more figuratively in *Resident Evil 0*. It was another romp through a dusty old building, in this case the Umbrella Training Facility next to the Spencer Mansion. Peer closer and you can see the wheels of change slowly grinding, with Capcom experimenting with real-time player switching and on the fly item dropping. For the most part, however, it was business as usual. To stay relevant, *Resident Evil* needed a rebirth, not just a remake, and it got it with *RE4*.

Hinted at in 1999, finally released in 2005 after four revisions (one of which was the uber-action, Gothic-drenched prototype that spawned the *Devil May Cry* series) *Resident Evil 4* set the standard for all action games to follow, but again its genesis was difficult and laborious, guided by Mikami's stubborn genius and a period of sharp introspection for the design team at Capcom. "The series had been recycling the same

patterns, the same gameplay each time," producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi states on *The Making of Resident Evil 4*. "So I spoke to Mikami-san about reshaping the game, winning back the fans and winning new fans that would never play a *Resident Evil* game."

Mikami threw himself into the production with gusto. As part of the 'Capcom Five', an exclusive agreement between Capcom and Nintendo to put out five games on the GameCube system, Mikami was nothing if not zealous. He insisted that *Resident Evil 4* wouldn't appear on the PS2, threatening that 'he would cut his head off' if such a thing came to pass. Naturally, it did, but thankfully Mikami hasn't suffered a decapitation yet.

He approached the game with the same attacking instinct as he had the PR. In the director's chair that he so coveted, he began another reign of perfectionist terror. There was also the old pressure on his shoulders that he hadn't felt since the first game: Mikami knew that if *Resident Evil 4* hadn't been a hit, it would have been the end for the franchise he helped create. Yet another countdown had started. ▶

Woah, this hall is dangerous!

Finding out who wrote that dialogue...

NO HISTORY OF *Resident Evil* is complete without mention of the dialogue that has given us the fear over the years, and not always for the right reasons. The original game's dialogue was written in-house by Kenichi Iwao, and is rightly regarded as both the best and worst the series has to offer. Barry Burton got most of the best lines: who can forget classics such as 'You were almost a Jill sandwich', 'I hope this isn't Chris's blood' and 'The master of unlocking!' Sadly for everyone involved, *Resident Evil 2* saw the introduction of Capcom's relationship with Flagship, a company geared around improving the quality of game scripts. Founded by Noboru Sugimura and Yoshiaki Okamoto (along with two others) after they had collaborated on putting *Resident Evil 2*'s script in order, the company would then advise on *Resident Evil 3*'s script (again written internally). Mikami would co-write *4*, before four different writers would collaborate on *Resident Evil 5*. Although sadly we don't know who wrote Albert Wesker's unintentionally dirty 'complete, global saturation' line. Unfortunately, Sugimura passed away in 2005, but his legacy still stands today.



Who's the boss?

Running down Resident Evil's best baddies

5. Black Tiger Spider

(RESIDENT EVIL, RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE)

Nestled in the heart of the Spencer Estate's underground tunnel network, the Black Tiger Spider is easily defeated, but not so easily forgotten. Horrifying in the PSone original, heart-attack-inducing in the remake, the Black Tiger makes it onto this list for nearly killing arachnophobes everywhere.



4. Krauser vs. Leon

(RESIDENT EVIL 4)

Leon's showdown with his former partner is the pinnacle of *Resi 4*'s use of QTEs. A cinematic knife-fight, this highlights everything the game does well: a feeling of power, OTT action and the tension that comes from knowing death is around every corner.



3. Albert Wesker

(RESIDENT EVIL 5)

Chris and Sheva have to work together to take out the virus-enhanced madman in *Resident Evil 5*'s gripping finale. Nice mechanics – turning out the lights so he can't see you; teaming up to inject him with a strength-sapping serum – complement the satisfying feeling of finally kicking Wesker's ass.



2. Lisa Trevor

(RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE)

Lisa is horribly disfigured, and her mind has been savagely twisted after spending years being experimented upon by Wesker, Birkin and Spencer. Unkillable, there's a both a horrible feeling of helplessness and a twinge of compassion as she stalks you in the remake, begging for a death you can't give her. Absolutely chilling.



1. Nemesis

(RESIDENT EVIL 3)

If *Resident Evil 2* is akin to *Aliens*, then *3* is *The Terminator*: a lean chase movie with a villain that seemingly can't be stopped. Hearing his signature music, and seeing him cry 'STAAAAAARS!' is enough to send a chill down any gamer's spine, and he keeps on coming and coming...



► Mikami was ruthless with his changes. Those infamous door opening screens and fixed camera angles were ditched for a third-person, over-the-shoulder camera, and *Resident Evil 4*'s story featured an upgraded Leon on a mission to remote and rural Spain to rescue the US President's kidnapped daughter. Leon was a far cry from the foppish cop of *Resident Evil 2*: now he was all-action, diving out of windows and suplexing enemies like he was auditioning for WWE. Umbrella Corporation and the series-defining zombies were gone, replaced with rural, burlap-sack-wearing Spanish cult members and crazed yet intelligent parasitic mobs straight out of a Lucio Fulci movie. Mikami had evolved 'the fear' from survival-horror to 'panic action': less a focus on puzzles and hoarding ammo as it was negotiating the waves of devious foes.

Capcom needed to be bold in its changes; it was, and the rest is history. Kobiyashi would go on to call *Resident Evil 4* "the masterpiece of the series," because all the mechanics are as tuned, precise and as co-dependent on each other as the movement of the fine, expensive watches that Okamoto once insisted to 1Up.com that everyone wears at Capcom. In the years following its release, it became clear how much *Resident Evil 4* changed videogames. Suddenly, you could see *Resident Evil 4* everywhere. As if he needed to, Cliff Bleszinski told an audience at GDC 2007 that he used *RE4* as an inspiration for *Gears Of War*, specifically the pacing and the camera, and Visceral Games' *Dead Space* series is also heavily influenced.



» *Code Veronica X* saw new cut-scenes added, including this *Matrix*-inspired fist fight between Wesker and Chris.



Its stupendous design had infected videogames, and its legacy was evolving. *Resident Evil 4* wasn't just an expertly-paced, relentlessly playable update of a decaying franchise: it had defined a genre, and continues to define it, with the over-the-shoulder view being its clear legacy.

Another rough ride then, but it was ultimately worth it. Fantastic sales had reinvigorated the series financially, but more importantly overwhelming critical acclaim had put the franchise back on the pedestal it had slid wearily off in years prior. *Resident Evil* was back. Mikami, however, wouldn't be. For those that had to produce the follow-up, old hands Jun Takeuchi and Masachika Kawata, there was surely no way to match 4's achievement. "We were under a lot of pressure," Kawata told **Retro Gamer** in an exclusive interview. "But we also got a lot of support."

The concept would see Chris Redfield return as the star, investigating *Resident Evil* outbreaks in Africa and eventually tying up his long-running feud with series antagonist Albert Wesker. He would be teamed with Sheva

“We were under a lot of pressure [on Resident Evil 5], but we also got a lot of support”

Alomar, a female soldier who would give the game its co-op partner. The production duo saw *Resident Evil 4*'s narrative as akin to a side-story, and were keen to bring things full circle. They also wisely kept the camera style and action focus of 4, and decided early on – “right from the start”, Takeuchi told Gamasutra – to focus on co-op play (although production director Yasuhiro Anpo contradicts him in the *Complete Official Guide Collector's Edition* by Piggyback, stating that *Resident*



» One of the greatest openings of any game, *Resident Evil 4*'s really set the tone for the whole experience.



» Sheva's introduction in *Resident Evil 5* is fine in co-op, but her AI is too troublesome to make single-player anything other than a chore.

Evil 5 was initially developed as a “single-player game”). Either way, co-op would be something the main series had never seen before.

The setting would be destined to reap the whirlwind of controversy, with Capcom being accused (and sternly refuting) accusations of racism, but Africa would offer the producers interesting new gameplay options. One of these

It's a telling statement, that of keeping an eye on Western developers, because *Resident Evil 5* has been accused of both being in awe of Western design philosophy (co-op, a shoe-horned in cover system) and not changing enough with the times. Takeuchi and Kawata would describe the project as “extremely demanding on both a physical and psychological level” in Piggyback's *Complete Official Guide Collector's Edition* and Takeuchi noted to G4TV that his experiences on *Resident Evil 5* had gone some way to influencing his decision on whether or not to work on the next numbered title in the series. “Right now, pretty much every day myself, Kawata and another producer at Capcom Japan are ▶

The sound of terror

WHILE *RESIDENT EVIL*'S dialogue may have been laughably bad since the outset, one aural element of the series that has always been first-class is the score Capcom uses to anchor its scares and give each *Resident Evil* its rich atmosphere.

Utter the name Masami Ueda to all but the most hardcore *Resident Evil* fans and you'll probably get a puzzled look in response, but anyone who has played the first three games would be able to identify work he collaborated on in a heartbeat. From the haunting-yet comforting melancholy of ‘Peace Of Mind’ (*Resident Evil*'s save room theme) to the terrifying strings of ‘Night Of Day’ (the mansion's second floor theme) and onto the relentless warcry beat of Nemesis's theme, Ueda and his contributors (including, but not limited to, *Viewtiful Joe* composer Akari Kaida) crafted just as much of *Resident Evil*'s mystique and intrigue as Mikami and company did.

Ueda stepped aside for *Resident Evil 4*, where the Spanish setting and new action focus called for a different vibe. Misao Senbongi took over, reflecting the drastic change of pace in the music. Senbongi wasted no time in driving home the differences, with the second piece from the game's score, ‘First Contact’. It is composed of passionate singing, fast acoustic guitar and driving rhythmic beats, and underscores the cultural difference of Leon's adventure in remote and rural Spain.

Resident Evil 5 saw Kota Suzuki take over as lead composer. For Takeuchi and Kawata, the recording of the score was a reminder of just how big the franchise had become.

“We were completely amazed when we heard over a hundred musicians play [at the 20th Century Fox Hollywood Studio] in perfect harmony by just reading their score sheets, practically instantly, without rehearsing,” the pair state in their foreword to *The Complete Official Guide To Resident Evil 5*. Often overlooked, *Resident Evil*'s music is key to both its thrills and chills. After all, what would the first game be without ‘Moonlight Sonata’?

Sideshow freaks

Getting to grips with Resident Evil's extended universe

LIKE ALL FAMOUS franchises, *Resident Evil* has mutated and evolved faster than even its creators could have imagined. As well as novelisations, comic books, action figures, big-budget films and even interactive ghost houses built like the Spencer Mansion, *Resident Evil* has branched out into other videogame genres as Capcom has aimed to exploit its killer franchise, establishing side-stories and tying the universe together into one unwieldy package.

This trend began in earnest with the release of 2000's *Resident Evil: Survivor*, a light gun title that was notable for being the first *Resident Evil* game seen from a first-person perspective. Players took on the role of Ark Thompson, an amnesiac who awakens on an Umbrella-owned island dedicated to spewing out bio-organic weapons. Poor controls and lukewarm gameplay, however, ensured that the game wasn't a critical success.

Undeterred, Capcom gave us *Gun Survivor 2* soon after, which took elements and scenarios from *Code Veronica* and repackaged them into another light gun-themed FPS. Again, the result was not critically successful. Neither was *Resident Evil Gaiden* for the Game Boy Colour, a spin-off that saw Leon and Barry thwart an outbreak on a cruise ship, sadly held back by the primitive technology of the time.

Much finer was 2003's *Resident Evil Dead Aim*, yet another FPS blaster set on a cruise ship. Introducing US and Chinese special agents Bruce McGivern and Fong Ling, it has ties to the main series but is at heart a rudimentary shooter that is light on scares.

2004 saw Capcom's bravest gamble yet, with the release of *Resident Evil Outbreak*, a team-focused co-op experience that saw up to four players working together to escape Raccoon City. Good decisions (having all the character be 'normal' people with special skills that aid their escape is a nice touch) clashed with bad – no voice chat! – to ensure that both *Outbreak* and its sequel are remembered as frustrating missteps, though they are ripe for a current-gen update now online gaming is a more stable experience.

After a series of misses, Capcom returned to the light gun mine it had furrowed so deeply, with two on-rails Wii titles that are both canonically sound and actually fun to play. The first is *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*, which is notable for telling the *RE* story from Albert Wesker's perspective and being the first *Resident Evil* game to show Umbrella founder Oswell Spencer on screen. The sequel, *Darkside Chronicles*, is as close as we're going to get to a full-blown *Resident Evil 2* remake for the time being. Deepening Krauser's relationship with Leon while also enabling players to revisit the RPD, it's well worth checking out for any fan who wants to expand their knowledge of the sequel.

Finally, there's the third-person shooter, *Operation Raccoon City*, a team-based shooter that was developed by Slant 6, which developed the so-so *Socom Confrontation*. While it gains kudos for being set in and around the events of *Resident Evil 2*, the actual game itself is pure bobbins and suffers from bugs and terrible gameplay. Best forget about it.

► playing blackjack to decide who is going to be stuck with the responsibility of making the next episode in the series."

Design changes, controversy and the changing landscape of game design (both fiscally and geographically) had taken their toll. Takeuchi would state to Famitsu that "*Resident Evil* is known for being able to keep up with the times", but for many fans, 5 didn't. AI-controlled Sheva was a nightmare compared

featured popular areas from past games, but lost a lot of its appeal on the second-hand market due to its inability to delete saves. There's a iOS port too, but it's not as good, being ill-suited to touch-based controls. Another 3DS exclusive appeared in 2012 in the form of *Resident Evil: Revelations*. A timed exclusive, it was eventually ported to PC, PS3 and Xbox 360 in 2013. While the core adventure is best described as average, it earns

“ We're playing blackjack to decide who'll be stuck with the responsibility of making the next episode ”

to *Gears Of War*'s Dom (the obvious inspiration for the addition) and the inability to move and shoot would prove a sticking point for fans who had played EA's *Dead Space*. It's destined to be remembered as a good effort, stuck between two worlds. Kawata at least has refused to dwell on it. "I am keen to think about the future of the series rather than the ones in the past," he told *Retro Gamer*. "I will constantly do my best to deliver something great for all the *Resident Evil* fans."

Capcom followed up *Resident Evil 5* with the ambitious *Resident Evil 6*, which featured three separate story lines that focused on some of the franchise's most beloved characters, including Leon Kennedy and Ada Wong. It was an interesting experiment, essentially being three different *Resident Evil* games in one. Despite exceptionally good sales, though, it divided critics and has some of the lowest scores for a main game in the franchise. And yet the series has kept rumbling on with varying degrees of success. *Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D*

additional points for its excellent 'Raid Mode' that allowed up to two players to fight together. The success of *Resident Evil: Revelations* led to a decent sequel that arrived in 2015. It marked a big change in direction for Capcom, as the company chose to use an episodic format and set the game between the events of *Resident Evil 5* and 6. It's a solid adventure, but is indebted to Naughty Dog's *The Last Of Us*, which had arrived in 2013. Capcom also released an impressive HD port of its excellent GameCube remake of the original *Resi* and has similar plans for *Resident Evil Zero*.

Despite the franchise's recent wobbles, there's no sign of the series dying yet. Why? Because man's oldest emotion is fear, and we love playing it out in controlled environments, preferably with a big gun and bad dialogue to go with it. The *Resident Evil* series has had its ups and downs, but its importance in the world of videogames is difficult to understate, as is the special place it has in the hearts of those who thought it safe to enter that rundown mansion back in 1996.

» One of the biggest triumphs of *Resident Evil: Revelations 2* was the return of Barry Burton who was looking for his daughter Moira, another playable character.



Special thanks to Paul Freshwater of www.crimson-head.com and Luca Taborelli of www.unseen64.net for their help with this article

Rogues' gallery

Breaking down Resident Evil's main players

For a franchise with so many instalments, and hence so many memorable characters, it would be near-impossible to feature them all. So we've narrowed it down to the main players on the *Resident Evil* stage, from Wesker to Claire Redfield. Sadly, Tofu didn't make the cut...

CLAIRE REDFIELD

Chris's sister and the star of *Resident Evil 2*, replacing former lead Elza Walker to tie the sequel in with the first game. She returns in *Code Veronica*, again as star. Loves motorcycles, hates Umbrella, and unfortunately has to spend a lot of time with that punk Steve Burnside in *Code Veronica*.

CONNECTIONS: Chris Redfield, *Resident Evil 2*, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, *The Mercenaries 3DS*.



ALBERT WESKER

Series villain and Chris's nemesis (and tormentor), Wesker pulls all the strings in his plot for world domination. Assassination, subterfuge and even genocide are all in a day's work, and his tendrils snake through the whole series.

CONNECTIONS: Ozwell Spencer, Ada Wong, Chris Redfield, Umbrella, STARS, William Birkin, HCF, Tricell, 'The Organisation'

APPEARANCES: *Resident Evil*, *Resident Evil Zero*, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, *Resident Evil 4* (side-story), *Resident Evil 5 + 6*, *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*, *Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles*



CHRIS REDFIELD

Former Air Force pilot and STARS member. Chris is last seen working for the *Resident Evil* Security and Assessment Association (BSAA) in Africa. He's the brother of Claire Redfield and has a mutual dislike for Wesker, who he frequently tries to kill. He finally bests Wesker in *Resident Evil 5*'s finale.

CONNECTIONS: STARS, Claire Redfield, Albert Wesker, Jill Valentine, BSAA, Sheva Alomar

APPEARANCES: *Resident Evil*, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, *Resident Evil 5 & 6*



JILL VALENTINE

She's 'the master of unlocking' and Chris's old partner. After escaping Raccoon by chopper in *Resident Evil 3*, she turns up in *Resident Evil 5* as a zombie-killing machine who is controlled by Wesker. Eventually, however, she is freed from her mind control and escapes with Chris and Sheva.

CONNECTIONS: STARS, Wesker, Umbrella, Barry Burton, Chris Redfield

APPEARANCES: *Resident Evil*, *Resident Evil 3*, *Resident Evil 5 & 6*, *The Mercenaries 3DS*



BARRY BURTON

Affable father figure as well as weapons specialist to the STARS Alpha Team, Barry is protective of Jill, saving her life on more than one occasion in the Spencer Mansion. Blackmailed by Wesker into joining his plot in *Resident Evil*, he helps Jill escape Raccoon City in *Resident Evil 3* seconds before the city is destroyed.

CONNECTIONS: STARS, Jill Valentine, Umbrella, Chris Redfield, Albert Wesker

APPEARANCES: *Resident Evil*, *Resident Evil 3*, *Resident Evil 5*, *The Mercenaries 3D*



OZWELL E. SPENCER

Founder of Umbrella Corporation, billionaire and all-round bastard, Spencer's reach affects most of the franchise. It is his mansion that contains the research that spills out into Raccoon City. His ultimate goal is to create a master race of new humans, but he is instead assassinated by Wesker.

CONNECTIONS: Umbrella, STARS, Albert Wesker, William Birkin, *Resident Evil 5*

APPEARANCES: *The Umbrella Chronicles*, *Resident Evil 5*



LEON S. KENNEDY

A rookie cop, whose first day at work marks the outbreak of *Resident Evil 2*. Later he finds himself working for the US Government in *Resident Evil 4*, and is dispatched to Spain to rescue Ashley Graham, the kidnapped First Daughter. Has a contentious relationship with spy Ada Wong that developed in *Resident Evil 2*.

CONNECTIONS: Claire Redfield, RPD, Ada Wong

APPEARANCES: *Resident Evil 2*, *Resident Evil 4*, *Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles*, *Operation: Raccoon City*



HUNK

Elite special forces operative who is known for always surviving even the most dangerous assignments, earning him the nickname Mr. Death. Steals the G-virus sample from Birkin on Wesker's orders in *Resident Evil 2*.

CONNECTIONS: Umbrella, Albert 2, *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*, *Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles*

APPEARANCES: *Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles*





Gran Turismo

» PLATFORM: PlayStation » DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital » RELEASED: 1997

Is it possible to have too much power? When you first get hold of a fully-tuned Nissan Skyline GT-R V Spec, you might just think so. This is a car that practically protests at being forced below 60mph, and one that exceeds 200mph without issue on a decent straight. It's a capable machine, but one which demands respect and expertise from its driver at all times. Taking the wheel for the first time is a frightening situation – you'll find yourself fishtailing across the track and struggling not to spin out at corners. If you're keeping up with the pack at all, it's purely because of the unhinged speed and power of the machine.

But if you spend a little while in the Skyline you'll come to adjust your braking distances, compensate for the vehicle's heavy frame and stay on the track, bringing your lap times tumbling down. It still seems like you're a long way from fully taming the unstable beast, but you've managed to gain control over one of the best vehicles *Gran Turismo* has to offer. ★

BIO

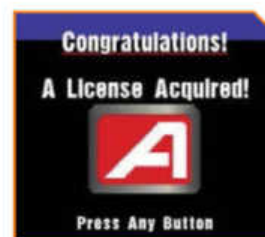
Not many games are in the works for five years, but *Gran Turismo* was worth every single day of labour. Having entered development two years before the PlayStation's launch, the game arrived in the final days of 1997 and redefined players' expectations of console racing games. Its packaging proudly declared it to be 'The Real Driving Simulator' and it was hard to argue, thanks to an impressive handling model, a 140 car roster and stunning visuals. Universal critical acclaim followed, and a staggering 10.85 million copies were sold.



MORE CLASSIC GRAN TOURISMO MOMENTS

Passing Your Test

One of *Gran Turismo*'s quirks is the licence system, which requires you to participate in a series of racing challenges. These can be rather strict, with automatic failure for leaving the track. The A Licence is much harder to obtain than the faintly useless B Licence, but your opportunities to race are much greater once you manage to pass its tests.



From All Angles

When *Gran Turismo* launched, if you were able to watch one of its replays without being blown away, there was a good chance you were just dead. Visually, the game was peerless. The environments were incredible, every single one of the cars was modelled with care (and oh-so-shiny) and the dynamic camera angles gave the appearance of a televised race.



Petrolhead's Paradise


The range of cars and tuning options in *Gran Turismo* was unprecedented for a console game, and it was something of a dream come true for the racing enthusiast. A dedicated player could find hours of satisfaction simply by buying cars and modifying them, in an attempt to extract the maximum performance from every single one of the game's 140 cars.



The Home Straight

You've narrowly held a lead for the last half of the final lap, but could have taken that last corner better. Now it's time to panic. As you near the finish line, beads of sweat form on your forehead, temptation overwhelms you and you hit the rear camera button. Your rival is close, but not quite close enough. You haven't screwed everything up, and victory is assured. *Phew.*





VIB-RIBBON

A big-eyed bouncing rabbit and a game that let you literally play your CD collection. Paul Drury asks Masaya Matsuura all about his thing on a string

We want to clear this up at the start. As much as we adore the minimalism of *Vib-Ribbon*, we wonder what caused the man who had introduced the PlayStation generation to the candy-coloured, Day-Glo worlds of *PaRappa The Rapper* and *UmJammer Lammy* to decide to shoot his next creature feature in black and white?

Masaya Matsuura leans back on his chair and smiles broadly. "Actually, we did try to create a colourful world at first but, you know, if you have fish and chips every day, you want to try other dishes."

The very English analogy is a sweet touch. We are sat in plush offices overlooking Nottingham's grand Council House, grabbing an hour with Matsuura-san before he delivers his keynote speech as part of the annual GameCity festival. We are joined by NanaOn-Sha's director of development Dewi Tanner, who helps with the occasional bit of translation, though Matsuura's command of our language demonstrates his long interest in Western culture. And we're here to discover the tale behind the cult PSone title *Vib-Ribbon*.

In the late Nineties, when everyone was going mad for polygons and the third dimension, along skipped

a resolutely 2D rabbit balanced on a wobbly tightrope. Matsuura might have already given us rapping dogs and guitar-wielding sheep, but this bug-eyed bunny still felt out of step with the times. If the bizarre lead character and esoteric rhythm-action gameplay wasn't enough, he'd gone and done it all with vector graphics. Was this due to a misspent youth playing *Asteroids* in the arcades of Akihabara, perhaps?

"No, actually," laughs Matsuura, "but I really love vector graphics. When I started to make my own music, everything went to the computer from analogue media, analogue waves. I was so excited to have friends who tried to create something using computers. One of them, who had a big impact on me, was part of the computer graphics team. At that time, computer graphics didn't have texture. It was wireframe. I really liked wireframe and this was the reason for *Vib-Ribbon*."

The distinct visual style came later, though. The roots of the rhythmic rabbit began shortly after the completion of *PaRappa The Rapper* in 1996, when Matsuura and his NanaOn-Sha development team were made a rather unusual proposition. "The game began as an advertisement for the Mercedes-Benz A-Class car," he explains. "They wanted to appeal to a younger audience in Japan, so they contacted Sony about using a game to promote the car. We were approached to take on the project. The very first prototype was not a wireframe, just a regular polygon-based car bumping along a road according to the audio. But it was a living car. The headlights were the eyes!"

Even at this early stage, the idea of using an external audio source to not

“ We always thought Vibri was a ballerina, dancing in the street, or a figure skater ”

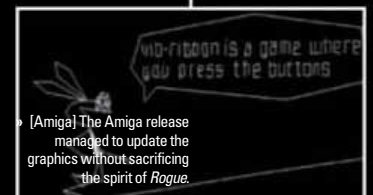
MATSUURA ON HIS GRACEFUL HEROINE



This technical innovation was accompanied by a conceptual one. The headlights of the Mercedes morphed into the wide eyes of a hyperactive rabbit, and the road became the ribbon that she was dancing along. Thus Vibri, the heroine of this most inventive of music games, was born, yet her form was anything but stable. Follow the rhythm correctly and she becomes a princess, but mistime her steps and she devolves into a frog and then a lowly worm, wiggling along the wire. There's almost a fairytale quality to the set of transformations.

“We always thought she was a ballerina, dancing in the street, or a figure skater,” muses Matsuura. “By becoming a frog and the way it moved, we wanted to make you feel bad when devolving and elated when evolving.”

There is certainly something euphoric when Vibri successfully negotiates 20 obstacles without tripping up and becomes the angelic Super-Vibri, yet that could be a tricky task. The game uses four basic shapes – square, circle,



IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: SONY

» DEVELOPER: NANAON-SHA

» PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION

» RELEASED: 1999

» GENRE: RHYTHM ACTION



» Timing is everything in *Vib-Ribbon*. Performing a string of loop-de-loops is especially satisfying.

WHAT'S THE FREQUENCY, ALEX?

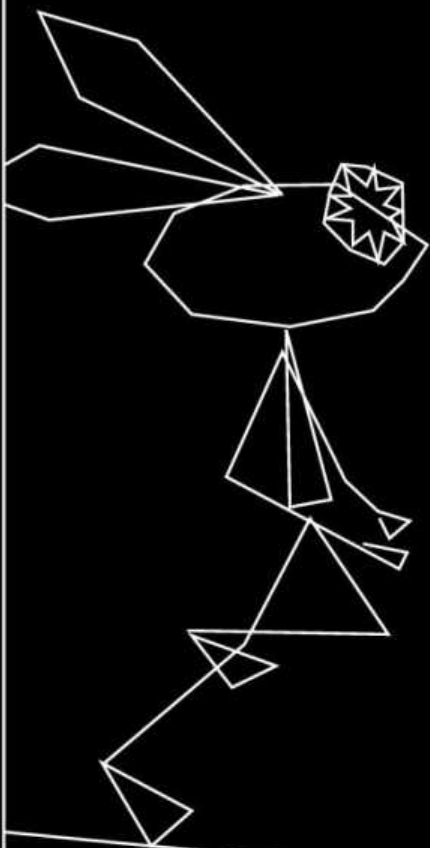


» The happy couple: Matsuura and Vibri.

Matsuura has been dubbed the father of rhythm-action games and Alex Rigopulos, head of Harmonix, the home of *Rock Band*, has a personal debt of gratitude to him.

“He came to me before they did *Frequency*,” says Matsuura, “and he had a very smart

system. They used a joystick for controlling the audio. How you moved it could change the notes and the frequency but for me, it sounded too random. I said to him something very simple: think about the game. This is a very interesting experimental system but maybe the audience needs play, excitement, results and be satisfied by playing the game. Focus on these things for your content.” Sound advice. We wonder if he has any predictions for future developments in the field. “I think we have great possibilities for game-based music and music-based games. I really want to explore different categories of music—for example, serious classical music. I’d love to conduct the London Philharmonic!”



triangle and a wiggly line – which correspond to the left and right shoulder buttons, down on the D-pad and X respectively. Hit the correct button as you approach the shape and Vibri gracefully vaults it. Get it wrong or mess up your timing and she blunders through it, ending your streak with a painful electric shock. Too many mistakes and you descend the evolutionary scale until the song abruptly ends in failure.

Sounds simple? It certainly is at first, and the use of only four inputs at a time when buttons were beginning to proliferate across joypads everywhere gives the game a charming retro feel, which nicely complements the old-school visuals. However, soon you'll be faced with weirdly shaped obstacles that combine two of the basic pieces in one and require some dextrous finger work to negotiate.

"Those combined shapes are designed in a very intuitive way," explains Matsuura. "Triangle and square – it's easy to combine these in the brain with the two buttons. That was



» An exclusive glimpse of NanaOn-Sha's aborted Mercedes-Benz project that evolved into *Vib-Ribbon*.

important to us. I wanted a game that used both hands together. My private reason is that I'm very addicted to playing drums and to play them well, you need to combine the right and left hand to fit the rhythm."

Vib-Ribbon can be an almost therapeutic experience when eyes and fingers are working in harmony, but as the speed and intricacy of the courses increases, it can become a dissonant nightmare. Things become even more challenging when your view of the ribbon swirls to a new viewpoint mid-song and, if that wasn't enough, the pieces start to float back and forth, changing the order in which they must be traversed in brain-addling fashion.

"That was a bug!" laughs Matsuura. "I had an old friend, a recording engineer who had worked with my old band Psy-S, who now worked for Sony on music. After *PaRappa*, Sony assigned



him to the project and he helped write the script. He found the bug that made the obstacles move from side to side... and the programmer really liked that! He said we should keep it."

Now, if *Vib-Ribbon* danced to a different drum in terms of game design, what really made it unique was that you could too. Once the game was loaded, you could insert any CD from your collection and the tunes became not only the backing track, but the music was actually used to create a

» Matsuura plays *Rhyme Rider Keronian* on the WonderSwan while your correspondent goes weak at the knees.



» *Vib-Ribbon* was released in Europe but not North America. Suckers.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Though not direct sequels, Matsuura and his team have created two spiritual successors to *Vib-Ribbon*, though neither got a release outside Japan

Mojib-Ribbon – PS2 (2003)



"The same concept as *Vib-Ribbon* but using text files. At that time, the PS2 was trying to be net-oriented. Our focus was a simple text message, which would be exchangeable online. We wanted to carry it into the game. Next, we found a speech synthesizer developed by a Japanese phone company, and we hooked it to a PS2. We worked with the engineer for almost two years so if you input a text file it would rap the rhythm. We made kind of a rap-thesizer!"

Vib-Ripple – PS2 (2004)

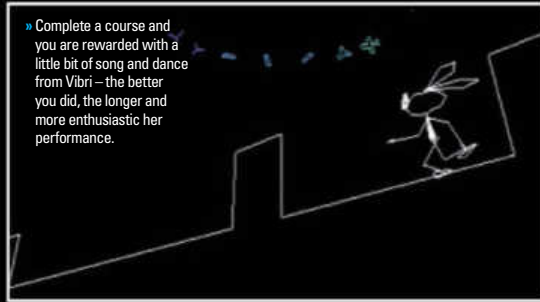


"At that time in Japan, everyone was exchanging pictures on their phones. We made the picture the ring of a trampoline. The system analyses areas of the same colour and if the shape looks like, for example, a mountain, like a triangle shape, the system will assign a mountain to that part and if you keep jumping on it, a mountain will come out! If you are successful you get the stamp of a mountain and you can use it to decorate the picture and send it back from your mobile."

» Masaya Matsuura (left) and Dewi Tanner at Nottingham's GameCity festival in 2009.



» Complete a course and you are rewarded with a little bit of song and dance from Vibri – the better you did, the longer and more enthusiastic her performance.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PARAPPA THE RAPPER

SYSTEM: PSONE

YEAR: 1996

RHYME RIDER KERORICAN

SYSTEM: WONDERSWAN

YEAR: 2000

MAJOR MINOR'S MAJESTIC MARCH (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: WII

YEAR: 2008

new course layout. Suddenly you could skip along to Sonic Youth, race the ribbon to Ravel, or vibrate to The Verve. The use of external audio in such an innovative way showed that Matsuura was definitely looking to the future. Eight seconds into the future, to be precise.

"The system looks eight seconds ahead of what you are listening to and calculates what is going to happen," he explains. "We created a 'window' to quantify the audio and if something interesting happens in this time, we pick it. It is about finding the most interesting frequency changes. If we see breaks or louder parts, we pick them and they become some sort of obstacle. The table is a very complicated one."

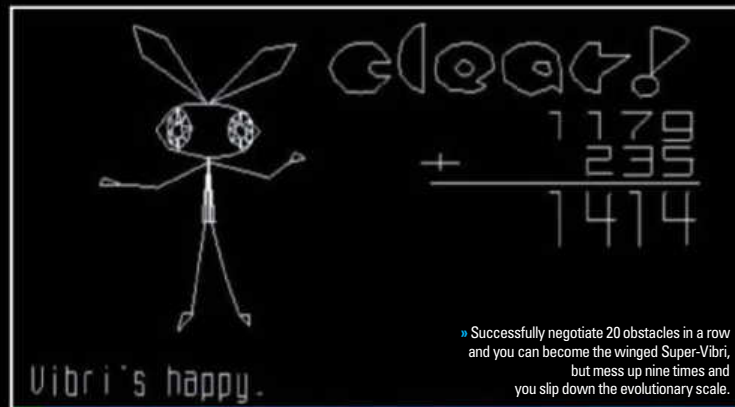
Matsuura spent three weeks writing this 'script', deciding how frequently the system would select something interesting to convert into a shape and searching for the optimum window size. The process also required experimenting with various musical genres, to often-surprising effect. "We had lots of CDs on our desks and we would try each one. I remember one day I played with Brian Eno. No pieces came out..."

Whether you were into ambient soundscapes, dub reggae or speed metal, half the fun was seeing how your music of choice would be rendered. While you were rewarded with a score at the end of a level, your tally was represented by swirling symbols, signifying a move away from traditional score-chasing. You could argue that *Vib-Ribbon* wasn't so much a game as another way to enjoy music, which Matsuura was well aware of.

"We had already had success with *PaRappa*, which was, of course, a hip-hop game. I was really satisfied that many people love *PaRappa*, but I was so

“ I remember playing Vib-Ribbon with a Brian Eno CD. No pieces came out ”

AIRPORT MUSIC ISN'T GAMING MUSIC...



surprised that many others didn't! So I decided to make a sequel, *UmJammer Lammy*, using rock music. I'm very happy to have two successful titles at that time but I hadn't had the experience of the audience loving both. It was a big thing for me. Someone comes, for example, and says that they really like *PaRappa* and another says that they really like *Lammy*, but nobody says both! It was kind of expected, I suppose, but it gave me a complex feeling, so I decided to make a music game where the user can choose their own tracks."

Thus Matsuura worked out how to please everyone, and his PSone swansong gave us a truly individual experience. One of the joys is tackling a cherished tune that throws up a monumentally difficult course and somehow finishing it, as if your fingers are responding to the madness without recourse to your befuddled brain. You feel at one with the music. For us, it was Motörhead's *Ace Of Spades* that first pushed us into the zone.

"Yes, I know that feeling," Matsuura nods. "You know about phantom pain? When you have lost a limb but still feel

pain, even when it is not there? That is pain, but games are fun. You might not be plugged in with a cable to your console, but you feel like you have a connection. Let's call it phantom fun!"

We all laugh at that. As Matsuura and his entourage prepare to meet their public, we just have time to ask whether Vibri might one day return. They exchange some furtive glances.

"There is no clear answer," says Tanner. "We really want to keep making *Vib-Ribbon* types of games. With Vibri and to some extent *PaRappa*, it depends on how much call there is from customers. If we start seeing more and more calls for these games then who knows..."

"It is still possible," adds Matsuura. "I think about it every day! It will never disappear from my brain."

Time to raise your voices in unison.

HOGS OF WAR

Released in 2000 for the PlayStation and PC, *Hogs Of War* is a hilarious, charming and mildly insane turn-based strategy game in which warring armies of pigs blow each other to smithereens in the pursuit of swill. Lead programmer Jacob Habgood explains to Phil Locke the method behind the madness gas



IN THE KNOW

- » PUBLISHER: INFOGRAMES
- » RELEASED: 2000
- » DEVELOPER: INFOGRAMES SHEFFIELD
- » PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION, PC
- » GENRE: STRATEGY

With just ten seconds left on the turn clock, your gamble pays off. Successfully parachuting behind enemy lines, you grab the Super TNT and immediately set about making your friend's life a brief misery. FOOM! "The green team strides the battlefield like a COL-OS-USS!"

There's no point trying to hide it – *Hogs Of War* is very similar to *Worms*. Both games draw from the same well, in that they're best played with friends, and remembered not just as games but as exercises in schadenfreude. However, *Hogs* started out as something different.

"The idea for *Hogs Of War* came from Ian Stewart," explains Jacob Habgood, lead programmer on *Hogs Of War*, referring to the founder and managing director of Gremlin

Interactive, the publisher and developer where work on *Hogs* began. "Gremlin, at that stage, was both a publisher and a developer. So, unlike today where I suppose there tends to be a lot of independence

between the two, a lot of the old publishing houses had the development side and the publishing side both in one building,

owned by one person – that person, in this case, being Ian Stewart.

"He had been to see *Babe* and felt that we should be making a game based on pigs. At the time, I think the top two games in the chart were *Command & Conquer* and *Worms*. As much as everybody compares *Hogs* to *Worms*, it was actually *Command & Conquer* that was the original brief – a kind of *Command & Conquer* with pigs."

Hogs Of War veterans will be surprised to learn that Chris Noonan's cinematic cute-fest was an influence on the game, and may well now wonder whether *Babe* would have been improved with mortars. The *Command & Conquer* influence also isn't immediately apparent to the player – without being a shameless copy, *Hogs Of War* certainly seems to wear the influence of *Worms* on its sleeve, both in its turn-based gameplay and in its fantastically British sense of humour.

Jacob agrees: "That's definitely what it became, but it started off being a concept based around a turn-based strategy game with pigs." The single-player campaign was actually considered to be more of a priority during a lot of the development period, but the team eventually came to realise what a strong multiplayer title they had on their hands.

Jacob explains it simply: "We thought about single-player more. But, as we got through development, we started to realise that it was the multiplayer that

people were getting very excited about. So it probably was that more effort was invested in the single-player, but a lot of people prefer the multiplayer game."

Hogs Of War isn't by any means an entirely original game, but what it lacks in originality it more than makes up in sheer fun. It's a pants-wavingly mad game, in which you, while being alternately praised and berated by Rik Mayall, control a squad of armed pigs and take them to war in a quest for a thinly veiled metaphor – namely, swill. Alternatively, you can forgo the single-player campaign and receive praise and abuse from Mayall for failing to shoot friends properly.

Surprisingly for such a silly, fun game, the development period was lengthy, with problems involving who would actually end up publishing the game. "It was started under Gremlin interactive," Jacob begins, "then Gremlin floated on the stock exchange. Things didn't go so well... Gremlin ended up being bought by Infogrames, the French company." Along with near cancellations of the game – Jacob remembers "two separate times where we were fighting for the life of the project to continue" – the uncertainty started to draw out the development further and further.

"It was a bit complicated. You were constantly having to re-justify the game's existence to a new set of management. The development time for *Hogs Of War* was probably about three years from

THE MAKING OF: HOGS OF WAR



» With the aid of a jetpack, pigs can actually fly.



» Although pigs flying isn't out of the question in this game, swimming sadly is.

start to finish, which is an insane amount of time. That was partly due to the fact that there were these periods where everything's on hold, when the company gets taken over, things don't move forward, nobody knows what's gonna continue, what's not gonna continue."

However, Jacob doesn't feel that this hindered the game's development much. "Having gone through several periods of this kind of thing, it did enable us to spend that time improving the game. We were

A very creative guy. But towards the end of the project, where it kind of took on a slightly different direction, it was a guy called Phil Wilson who took over as the 'everyday' designer on it, as the guy who actually tweaked all of the levels, and designed the finished version of the levels. He was a very creative guy, very passionate about his discipline. He would go home every night and play the build that we'd created for him, and come back the next morning with a list of changes

Hogs Of War seems to wear the influence of Worms on its sleeve, both in its turn-based gameplay and in its sense of humour

having to constantly re-present the game, and rethink the ideas behind the game, the focus and so on. While it represented a challenge, it probably also benefited the final product because it had been through so much, so many iterations.

"We were lucky that, towards the end, there was a guy who worked for Infogrames called Sean Millard, who is now the creative director of Sumo. He came down and had a look at *Hogs* and thought it was the best game he'd played in ages."

Jacob, who coded the engine for the PlayStation, is quick to praise his colleagues on *Hogs Of War*. "The designer behind the game was a guy called Ade Carless, the guy that invented *Zool* and various other games.

that we needed to make. He went on to work at Realtime Worlds on *Crackdown*."

Part of the appeal of *Hogs Of War* is that it's so charming. There's no hard-nosed realism, nor anything even resembling it. This is a game in which a spy can steal an opposing player's trotter, rendering him armless. Part of this charm is in its anachronistic nature – in a world where universality is everything, it's refreshing to play a game that's so unashamedly local.



» It's always good to reach out and touch one of your old friends.



» *Hogs Of War* shared *Worms*' proclivity for bizarre weapons.

"Now," says Jacob, "the big companies, they want global games, built to global audiences. That's why there was never a sequel to *Hogs*. There were several rumours – we started one, and worked on the game for about six months. *Hogs* sold very well, but only in terms of a European phenomenon. It didn't really sell in the US at all. For publishers at the time, that wasn't a viable approach; they didn't feel that was what they wanted. It was too British, too European and too quirky, which I think is a shame."

There's a real sense that the development team were having fun when the game was being made. "I'd definitely say that one of the things that was so great about working on *Hogs* is that at that stage team sizes were manageable enough that everybody could have a say,"

Jacob explains, "so more than any of the other projects I've ever worked on, it was a kind of team collaboration, and everybody could have a chance to put their own creative input into the finished game."

"SOUNDS FUNNY"

THERE'S AN EXTREMELY home-grown and localised sense of humour to *Hogs Of War*, with a lot of the humour relying on well-known national stereotypes. However, *Hogs* is more silly than jingoistic.

"In every different territory that it went out in, we had a different personality doing the voices for it," remembers Jacob. "So, in France, they had French comedians that were voicing it; Germany had people that were known in Germany, and so on and so forth."

"Although it had this very British feel, and these European stereotypes – perhaps not particularly politically correct ones – if you played the French version it had the same about the English. In every European territory it had their stereotypes of how they saw every other European country, so it was very balanced. It was extremely popular in Germany."



WARNING

DINO CRISIS

TAKE THE RESIDENT EVIL TEMPLATE, REPLACE THE SHAMBLING REANIMATED CORPSES WITH GIANT LIZARDS AND YOU'VE GOT A FRANCHISE FAR MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN THE BASIC PREMISE COULD EVER SUGGEST. LUKE ALBIGÈS LOOKS BACK AT THE CLASSIC TRIASSIC TRILOGY THAT NEVER QUITE MADE PRE-HISTORY



Capcom has a pretty good knack for knowing when it's onto a winning formula. 1942 was its first big hit in the arcades, and after a few years of trying new ideas, it was back to World War II for a number of quick-fire sequels and updates. *Mega Man*? Yeah, that dude was pretty busy for a while there. *Final Fight* did well and before you knew it, it was scrolling fighters as far as the eye could see. And then it was the turn of *Street Fighter*, the second game being a landmark fighter that saw countless iterations while its template was applied to everything from vampires to superheroes.

So after Capcom found success hidden away behind an eagle-crested panel within the eerie walls of the Spencer Mansion, it shouldn't have come as any real surprise to anyone that the *Resident Evil* formula was next. As well as an ambitious and excellent zombie-packed sequel, Capcom had greater plans for this format. These first came to light with the announcement of *Dino Crisis*. While it's easy to look back and see the game as just a way of making a quick buck by switching out zombies for dinosaurs, there's a good deal more that *Dino Crisis* and its sequel did that make them worth celebrating.

Think back to that famous moment in *Resident Evil*. You edge down a creepy corridor terrified of what might be around the next corner, but manage to reach the end without incident. But then, on a later visit, your over-confidence in your own safety is shattered as rabid dogs come barreling in through the windows. It was ingenious, both as a way of keeping players on their toes and technologically – the problem with pre-rendered environments such as those in the early *Resident Evil* games is that anything that can or will change tends to stick



» The agility of the dinosaurs meant that you'd often find yourself cornered.

"THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN JUST SWAPPING ONE SET OF ENEMIES FOR ANOTHER"

out like a sore thumb, just as it does in old cartoons. This feat could only be achieved so surprisingly with clever camera placement to ensure the windows that would break couldn't be seen. Terror could only come from off-screen, effectively.

So, despite the fact that PlayStation was starting to show its age, Capcom made the bold move of adopting full-polygon environments. It still took pride in its role as camera operator, so the fixed viewpoints remain, though these could sweep, pan and shift far more naturally than a static backdrop. Some overall polish was lost in the process, sure, but this was for the greater good. There would be nothing that you could take for granted as you did those cleverly out-of-shot windows – *Dino Crisis* could terrify from the word go by allowing bad things to happen anywhere, any time. And with this new (well, extremely old) breed of predators more than happy to take advantage of this technological leg-up, the sense of constant unease was one



» Enemy variety doesn't matter so much when the basic ones are terrifying.

of the game's most potent tools in separating itself from its spiritual source.

Yet there's far more to it than just swapping one set of enemies for another. Most of *Resident Evil*'s enemies are either lethargic or fragile – it isn't until the Hunters come into play that there's ever that much sustained tension, though their clacking footsteps will admittedly haunt us for life. Going up against the scaly newcomers, on the other hand, is like dealing with an army of Hunters, only ones that can work together, navigate the whole environment and come from anywhere. Where *Resident Evil* used slow plays and suspense to define survival horror, *Dino Crisis* instead had a constant sense of being stalked by something and a far more immediate and deadly threat when it did inevitably find you. This was survival terror.



Capcom made as much as it possibly could out of the idea that Regina was being hunted. In *Resi*, you can happily push past a group of brain-munchers and make for the door, safe in the knowledge that they haven't got a clue how to work door handles. One of the first main surprises of *Dino Crisis* comes when you try to adopt the same strategy and, after giving you just long enough to assume you're safe, the raptor that was just chasing you comes crashing through the door or leaps over a nearby fence. Outside of the designated safe rooms (where you save and change up your gear), nowhere is actually safe. The panic is layered on further by some clever and cruel design choices – having to bandage severe wounds so you don't leave trails of delicious smelling blood for the predators to follow, for instance, and having dinosaurs capable of knocking your equipped weapon out of your hand.

Surviving this new nightmare with the STARS team's toolset would be frankly impossible, so Capcom also had to rework its control setup. Classic *Resi* tank controls remain at the heart of the system, though the ability to move and shoot at the same time is invaluable against the far speedier enemies, as is the quick 180-degree turn – both features that have since filtered back into the *Resident Evil* series. The same is true of many features of this so-called palette swap, actually. The persistence of the dinosaurs is mirrored in that of the Crimson Head zombies in



» Don't open that door! No really, the raptor will just follow you anyway.



» The original *Dino Crisis* turned out to be a surprisingly graphic game...

THE MISSING LINK

How *Dino Crisis* nearly made it to Game Boy Color

The *Resident Evil* similarities just keep on coming with this, the revelation of an ambitious yet unreleased Game Boy Color port. Announced in early 2000, a portable version of *Dino Crisis* was in production at M4, the same studio that successfully shipped *Resident Evil: Gaiden* to a lukewarm reception. Whether due to poor performance or reviews for *Gaiden*, or some other factor, the game would never see light of day, although we have it on good authority that fair progress was made on the project. In fact, calling in a few favours, we got hold of ex-M4 chap Tim Hull who told us that there is indeed both a selection of assets of the game

and a demo ROM in existence. Sadly, he's off traveling for the foreseeable future and they're buried away in his attic somewhere. If and when he returns from his interesting mission to learn about how different cultures game, we'll try and steal a look at it. Oh, and share it with you guys as well. We're nice like that.





» Coming face-to-face with T-Rex, the sense of helplessness is overwhelming.

» Sorry Dylan, but we never really liked you as much as Regina. Nothing personal.



anachronistic monsters. The two feel almost unconnected outside of the name – and of course returning protagonist Regina, alongside some new guy who also really doesn't like dinosaurs – but some elements remained true, such as having to collect a bunch of disks that somehow open locked doors. And even with this new action-heavy slant, the intelligence, speed and overwhelming force of the reptilian opposition still made it a pretty daunting challenge regardless of how high the mountain of ammo you were sat on was.

Significant change for the better, then, and the reviews reflected this. *Dino Crisis 2* was almost unanimously well-received by critics but, coming so late in the PlayStation's life (it was released the same day PlayStation 2 launched), it managed to do pretty well at retail but couldn't replicate the original's numbers. With no more big PSone games left to come, Capcom couldn't even spice up the deal with an enticing demo disc this time around.

More important than any of this, though, is what a monumental turning point this was for Capcom. Things *could* change, and still be as loved – if not more so – than their predecessors. *Street Fighter EX* was the closest it had previously come to such a monumental design change between iterations, though that was neither well received nor anything more than misguidedly walking the polygon path in a pair of particularly unsuitable shoes. For a company so founded on iterative sequels and gradual improvements, this revelation must have been a hard thing to take on board, but it set the gears in motion for the changes behind one of the greatest games of all time. Reaction to later *Resident Evil* games such as *Code: Veronica* and *Zero* must have caused no small amount of déjà vu at Capcom HQ – fans had started to feel the same way about the core games as they did about the dinosaur-themed 'spin-off' when *Resi* was just two games old. And again, simply changing gear wouldn't have been enough. It was time to change the whole damn engine.

Yes, *Resident Evil 4* owes a debt of gratitude to *Dino Crisis 2*. The pack mentality and terrifying pace of the Ganado was a radical departure for the usual lurching and shuffling of the infected, though it was oddly familiar to those who had had a pack of raptors snapping at their heels. With several failed attempts

► the GameCube remake and inventory management and puzzles have become increasingly more complex as the horror series has gone on, as first seen in *Dino Crisis*. The very idea of being stalked lies at the heart of *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, a game that was in development alongside this and actually, one to which *Dino Crisis* probably owes a good deal of its success.

Not confident enough that the world had picked up the extent to which *Dino Crisis* was more than just 'Resident Evil with dinosaurs', Capcom elected to bundle it with a playable demo of the third *Resident Evil*. The practice had worked wonders for Square in the US, with commercial gambles such as *Tobal No 1* and *Brave Fencer Musashi* backed up with demos of the latest *Final Fantasy* games to make them that much more appealing. It's certainly one of the first instances in the UK, though it wasn't long before others were following suit – Konami famously charged sneaking enthusiasts 40 notes for the best bit of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and a free *Zone Of The Enders* tech demo – and these days, the practice is commonplace.

It was the right move though, because the majority of gamers to this day still refer to *Dino Crisis* as 'Resident Evil with dinosaurs'. While technically true, it's

"RESIDENT EVIL 4 OWES A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO DINO CRISIS 2"

more than a little unfair in light of the gameplay and technology innovations that set it apart. If Capcom wanted to truly prove there was a gap between *Resident Evil* and *Dino Crisis*, it would have to make significant changes to the game's fundamental design if and when it came to making a sequel. Which, since the first game sold well, was always going to happen.

And lo, significant changes were made. The survival motif was all but entirely ditched in favour of something more supportive of the original's often frenetic pace, namely the beating heart of an arcade shooter. Ammo was doled out generously rather than rationed, while the game actively kept score as you tore through wave after wave of the



» Unlike many PSone games, *Dino Crisis 2* still holds up brilliantly today.



» Larger dinos are far less intimidating in the action-heavy sequel.

» A solid scoring system laid the foundations for *Resi 4*'s Mercenaries mode.

MIKAMI OF DARKNESS

The horror legacy of one of Capcom's guiding creative forces



RESIDENT EVIL 2

■ As well as directing the original, Mikami also worked on the amazing second game. It's with good reason that many still champion this as the best game in the series – graphics aside, it still holds up brilliantly.



DINO CRISIS

■ Trading zombies for dinosaurs was a great idea in concept, but it would take someone with the horror vision of Mikami to pull it off. It had *Resi*'s cheap scares, sure, but it also had a shed-load of real tension.



DEVIL MAY CRY

■ Another one that owes much to *Resident Evil*, having been born from a failed 3D prototype. We're glad it went wrong, though – the action-packed gothic horror gave us one of gaming's best-loved modern characters.



RESIDENT EVIL 4

■ This controversial series reboot changed so much about the standard *Resident Evil* formula but stayed true to its horror roots. Many of Mikami's novel gameplay devices are now par for the third-person shooter course.



SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED

■ With Mikami's horror sensibilities, Suda 51's creativity and EA's money behind it, this should've been huge. Similar to *Resi* 4 gameplay-wise and stylish as hell, it deserved to do better.



THE EVIL WITHIN

■ Good to see he's still got it. Mikami's new project looks incredible, very much a traditional horror experience but one where next-gen visuals will be able to genuinely affect and scare players. Gulp.



» They're scary in the first game; here, they're just a points payday.



» *Dino Crisis 3* has what many regard to be the worst videogame camera ever.



» Fictional dinosaurs could never excite the inner child like the real thing did.

at changing things up in the years prior to *Resi* 4's release – *Street Fighter EX* and *Devil May Cry 2* being the worst offenders – *Dino Crisis 2* remained a shining example of how going back to the drawing board isn't always a bad move. But it's in the unlockable mini-game *The Mercenaries* that we see most of Regina's influence. The score attack mentality, the insane pace and the retention of horror elements in what is ostensibly a pure action game... it all comes straight from *Dino Crisis 2*. Are we saying *Resident Evil 4* wouldn't have happened had it not been for *Dino Crisis*? No. What we're saying is that it would likely have been a very different game.

There's a chapter missing from this story, though. No, not the one about that awful PlayStation 2 lightgun *Dino Crisis* spin-off. That's not even a chapter – it's just a sentence, and it's right there. We're talking about a part we'd rather forget. The part where a game

that proved to Capcom that change can be a good thing got a sequel that sent the gaming world a very different message. We're talking, of course, about the embarrassment that is *Dino Crisis 3*.

Was it made while the entire creative and technical teams were on holiday? Was it produced during a brief period where perception-altering drug use was mandatory at Capcom? Was it an elaborate yet costly stunt to troll a Western-developed console? Whatever the reasoning behind it (we're pretty sure it was none of those things), the fact remains that *Dino Crisis 3* is one of the worst games Capcom has ever put its name to. Seemingly done with the constraints of planet Earth after just two games, Capcom saw fit to set the third on a space station. And these weren't your run-of-the-mill dinosaurs

like they had in the past either, oh no. These were genetically engineered dinolikes, produced in their thousands so they could be conveniently (and tediously) slain in their thousands. It was even more an action game than *Dino Crisis 2*, with new hero Patrick whizzing around on a jetpack while firing hot laser death at loads of space monsters. Oh God, it was horrible.

It was the camera that proved to be the game's (and perhaps even the franchise's) mass extinction event, though. A hangover from the series' glorious past, the fixed viewpoint system simply couldn't keep up with either

JURASSIC LARKS

More must-play games for those who like their antagonists gigantic and extinct

RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER (1989)

■ After huge success with *Target: Renegade*, Imagine Software attempted the same trick again. Unfortunately, its third original *Renegade* game was simply terrible, with stiff controls and dull fighting. Its saving grace is a time-travelling theme allowing you to head back to the prehistoric age and punch dinosaurs in the face.



CHUCK ROCK (1991)

■ Core Design must really love dinosaurs. *Tomb Raider* came later, but this is the story of a cartoon caveman with a penchant for lobbing bloody great boulders, which proves helpful for combat and platforming. The final boss was another T-Rex, albeit one wearing boxing gloves and shorts. He was scarily cheap too, as we recall.



WHERE TIME STOOD STILL (1988)

■ How do you improve on *The Great Escape*? Easy, add dinosaurs. This is a superb isometric adventure with clever gameplay mechanics that had you controlling a group of people, stranded in a strange land. Before long, various dinosaurs are out for your blood and you'll need to do everything you can to avoid being eaten.



PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930 (1989)

■ This classic SNK shooter doesn't just rely on dino cameos – it's totally built around the scaly buggers. Fly your biplane through a remote island in the Bermuda Triangle, laying waste to anything that doesn't belong in the Thirties. Simple enough, but great fun, and it features some of the most memorable boss battles in the genre.



DINOPARK TYCOON (1993)

■ What could be better than *Theme Park*? Easy *Theme Park* crossed with all sorts of different dinosaurs. The end result was *DinoPark Tycoon*, a solid strategy title with an education slant that allowed you to fill your zoo with long-extinct lizards.

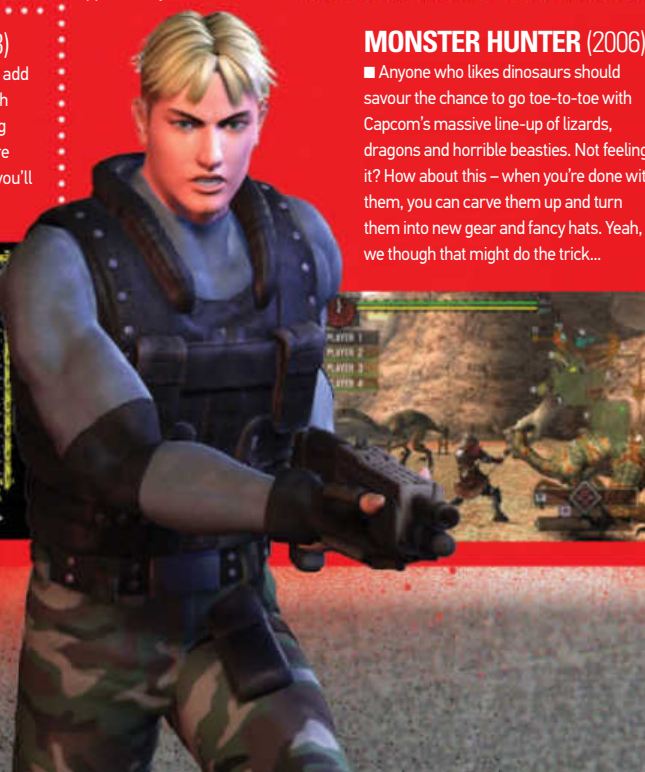
TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER (1997)

■ It's a dirty word these days but, in the Nineties, *Turok* could do no wrong. Both this and its sequel feature loads of dinosaurs to shoot – some modded in amusing, *Dinoriders* fashion – and *Rage Wars* set a benchmark for console deathmatches. What happened to you, Turok? Sob.



MONSTER HUNTER (2006)

■ Anyone who likes dinosaurs should savour the chance to go toe-to-toe with Capcom's massive line-up of lizards, dragons and horrible beasts. Not feeling it? How about this – when you're done with them, you can carve them up and turn them into new gear and fancy hats. Yeah, we thought that might do the trick...



CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED (1998)

■ The time-hopping threequel features an entire set of levels set in prehistoric times, though that didn't seem to change much in terms of game design. Running away from a Triceratops, dodging and spinning your way through jungles... yeah, it was pretty much classic *Crash*. Only with a Triceratops.



THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI (1990)

■ Why would a ninja fight a dinosaur? We'll answer that question with another question – why wouldn't a ninja fight a dinosaur? What could be more awesome, after all? The New York boss was clearly Godzilla in the copyright nightmare that was the original game (hi, Batman) but was later changed to a skeletal dinosaur.



3D MONSTER MAZE (1981)

■ Ladies and gentlemen, gaming's first dinosaur. Sure, you can outrun the lumbering fool and his gummy grin but don't assume he's harmless – you'll see his teeth if he catches you, that's for sure. Massively pioneering back in the day, it remains a highly atmospheric game of cat-and-mouse.





JURASSIC PARK (1993)

■ Of course. There were loads of licensed games released around the rebirth of dino-cool that was *Jurassic Park*, with this iffy Mega Drive platformer being among the better ones. That tells you pretty much everything you need to know about *Jurassic Park* games. Oh, apart from the fact that *Operation Genesis* was ace.



PRIMAL RAGE (1994)

■ With the iconic *Jurassic Park* theme still echoing around in everyone's heads, kids and grownups alike would bicker about which dinosaurs would win in a fight. We're not sure this awful beat-'em-up is an entirely scientific way to find out, but it might just have settled a few arguments all the same. And then caused a bunch more. Oh well.



CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS (1993)

■ Based on comic series *Xenozoic Tales* and tied into a Saturday morning cartoon, *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* had no right to be as good as it was. Perhaps the most interesting element was the use of dinosaurs as a third faction that could attack both players and enemies, something we don't think we've seen in the genre since.



SUPER BC KID (1994)

■ Or *Bonk*, if you'd rather. Chuck Rock's younger brother looks to be suffering from rather severe head trauma, most likely caused by his continued use of his own skull as an offensive weapon. Still, at least the platform action games were pretty good, even if the character wasn't.



TRESPASSER (1998)

■ Another *Jurassic Park* title, sure, but this list wouldn't be complete without this inept shooter. After promising the moon on a stick, the only things *Trespasser* delivered were a graphics engine that only about eight PCs on the planet could make look good at that time and accidental hilarity in the way protagonist Anne (voiced by Minnie Driver) interacts with the world. Too bad.



» Thanks, *Dino Crisis 3*. Thanks for killing off a franchise that we really cared about...

► the frantic pace or the complex design of the ship, frequently leading to situations where you'd instantly double back on yourself as the viewpoint shifted or find yourself shooting enemies that aren't even on the screen with only the HUD to let you know when they were dead. Capcom, after careful consideration, we have decided not to endorse your game.

So have we seen the last of *Dino Crisis*? It's been a decade now without a new game, and even the most die-hard fans are starting to fear the worst. Capcom's VP of strategic planning and business development Christian Svensson recently spoke with IGN, and it doesn't sound too hopeful. "*Dino Crisis 3* I think is where it went off the rails," he said. "There are discussions, *Dino Crisis* comes up from time to time, but there isn't any burning desire from R&D or the business side to light that franchise back up again." And while we'd love to see some bright spark at Capcom extract the DNA from back when the series was good and bring it back to life, the fear that we could see another *Dino Crisis 3*-level disaster means that it's probably best that it remain

extinct. And hey, at least we can still look at the pretty fossils.



THE DIVIDE: ENEMIES WITHIN

Publisher:

Viacom New Media

Developer:

Radical Entertainment

Platforms:

PlayStation,
PC

Released:

1996

Genre:

Adventure

WITH SO MANY TITLES RELEASED FOR SONY'S PLAYSTATION IT'S INEVITABLE THAT SOME OF THEM WOULD DISAPPEAR OFF THE RADAR OF MANY GAMERS. WE'D LIKE TO RECTIFY THAT BY INTRODUCING YOU TO ONE OF THE CONSOLE'S HIDDEN GEMS, A SUPERB ADVENTURE GAME THAT SHARE'S MORE THAN A PASSING RESEMBLANCE TO THE EXCELLENT SUPER METROID. PREPARE YOURSELVES FOR A REAL TREAT!

OTHER VERSIONS

Other versions of *The Divide: Enemies Within* were developed by Radical Entertainment. One release was a PC version, receiving even less fanfare than the PSOne game. Reviewers of the day were harsh, flaying for having pre-set save areas rather than quick-saving. Needing a Windows 95 based Pentium PC with 133Mhz and 16Mb RAM, this might be a cheaper option for some, and at the very least an interesting curio to own. More interestingly is that according to Greg James, who was Programmer and QA Director at Radical Entertainment, they also developed a Sega Saturn version. Having never seen one in the wild, we're sure collectors would pay big money for a beta copy...



» Right: The minimalist cover and obfuscated title did not sadly encourage sales.

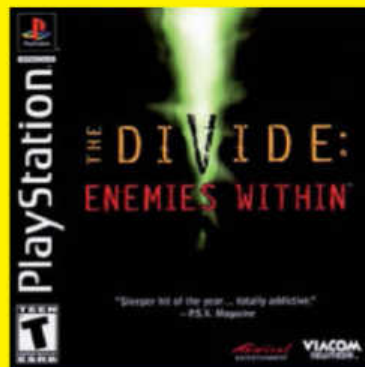
For some games it would seem as if destiny itself was intent on bringing about failure. It's as if nothing, not even excellence, could have saved them from bargain bins and commercial obscurity. *The Divide: Enemies Within* (hereafter referred to as *Divide*) was such a game, plagued with problems from the very beginning, ultimately ignored by critics and consumers alike and yet somehow among all this managing to be, in Retro Gamer's opinion, not only a fantastic PSOne game but also a fine homage to Nintendo's *Super Metroid*.

Problems started when Radical Entertainment sought a publisher – each time they found one it was bought out, leaving them hanging. When *Divide* finally came to market it was very late, sneaking into American stores at the tail-end of 1996.

The unintuitive name resulted in incorrect listings, while most magazines only got around to reviewing it in early 1997. Their biggest criticism along with average scores? That it was too 16-bit in terms of design and too much like a last generation title. It was almost universally shunned.

Now, it must be asked, what does “too 16-bit” even mean? The game features a complex control scheme utilising every button on the pad, various multi-use items and weapons, and a gradually expanding area of exploration. By all accounts the gameplay was substantial. Neither could it have been a result of everyone's obsession with the third-dimension and aversion to all things 2D – *Divide* implemented 3D with great panache and achieved all that was possible at that time. In all likelihood the comments probably arose because of its startling similarity to the SNES classic *Super Metroid*, in terms of atmosphere and design. The cliché of familiarity breeding contempt suddenly seems apt. Its greatest blessing became its ultimate flaw – a simple case of bad timing, being released long before the term “Metroidvania” came into vogue and people started clamouring for all and any such titles available.

Divide works on two different levels: it has a complicated well written plot coupled with incredible atmosphere, which is backed up by solid and accomplished gameplay. The game starts after a rousing written account detailing the main characters, Tanken and Advina, both of whom are





» It's a descendant of the creature from the intro – and it appears to be clutching a Terragator unit

mercenaries protecting a ship of sentient AI refugees, which is escaping a planet in the throes of a Luddite-styled revolution – Tanken's motives being to break away from the ways of the mysterious old order. None of the technicalities are explained and much is left to the imagination, meaning the story doesn't run the risk of sloppy writing or feeling overworked. A respectable looking FMV introduces their vessel drifting through

Over an unknown period of time The Divide thaws out and Tanken eventually regains consciousness, his Terragator unit badly damaged (with all items having been stolen) and barely operable, at which point the player takes control. The time spent lying there is never disclosed, but by the look of how drastically everything has changed, the implication is millennia. Advina is likely dead and you are now stranded with no

IT HAS A COMPLICATED WELL WRITTEN PLOT COUPLED WITH INCREDIBLE ATMOSPHERE, WHICH IS THEN BACKED UP BY SOLID AND WELL DESIGNED GAMEPLAY

space, with all passengers in hibernation, as it searches for a suitable new home world. An uninhabitable frozen planet is discovered, but maybe the gaping fissure on its surface can support life, and so ten automated probes are dispatched.

Things go awry when one of these probe crashes and kills the mate of an indigenous creature, while the radiation from them grants sentience to all nearby life. Tanken and Advina are awoken from cryo-sleep hibernation and board their enormous Terragator units (giant walking mechs), before heading down into *The Divide*. The enraged creature attacks and immobilises them, before carrying Advina off. Tanken remains and is again plunged into hibernation when his heating unit fails.



» Be wary in the Lava Rift, the enemies will try to ambush you as shown here

WHY YOU MUST PLAY!: ACTRAISER

BEASTLY BOSSES

The bosses were all once harmless foragers, now mutated over the millennia by the probes' radiation. Here's a selection.



MOROPUS – THE CLAWED BEARHORSE (SIC)

As the first hideously deformed guardian, Moropus guards the Jumper which frees you from the confines of ground level. Fast strafing makes short work of him.



PAPILLION – THE BAD SEED

Arguably the toughest boss, by virtue of you being underpowered. A hybrid of plant and insect, Papillion takes two forms: first a pod firing deadly seeds, followed by a hatched larva with missiles. Keep jumping!



GIANWHU – THE CRABBY ASSASSIN

By now you should have the Ice Grippers, which thankfully restore standard walking. Ignore his formidable size, GianWhu is slow and poorly mobile – just make sure to avoid his powerful attacks.



GASTRO – THE LIZARD KING

This multi-tailed serpent lives in the side of a giant mountain, occasionally poking out to attack you. Make use of diagonal firing and the available platforms. Don't fall down the ravine just below him!

MAGICAL MOMENT

There were many magical moments where it hit you just how inspired by *Metroid* things are. Cynics may call it plagiarism and unoriginal, but we say it's the sincerest form of flattery. There are Power Bombs, Missiles and 99 unit Energy Tanks that resonate with a familiar chime when collected, not to mention an expanding map, several elevators, and more.





» Thankfully the map can be easily panned and zoomed, because there's nothing more frustrating than a 3D game with poor navigation



» You probably can't hear it by looking at this screenshot, but the music is hauntingly good. Trust us on this one

TERRAGATOR FULL OF TRICKS

Just like *Super Metroid* there are many items that power you up and enable further progress. Some important ones:



1

REPAIR KIT

The game starts with your Terragator unit limping due to damage. Find this to enable normal walking.



2

TERRAIN MAPPER

This handy item maps where you've already been in the game, displaying it as a moveable blue polygon display.



3

JUMPER UNIT

Until you've found the jumper unit, even small obstacles stop you. Later on you're able to double jump.



4

TRANSPORTER KEY

This key activates the dormant transporter system. But who built it, and for what reasons?



5

HEATING UNIT

Essential for the Ice Chasms, this keeps the joints defrosted and seats toasty warm.



6

ARMOUR

There are two armour upgrades: the first is found in the Ice Chasms, the second is found in the Sky City.

like the reading of another's diary. Why were the once docile creatures suddenly driven to create huge eerie structures throughout their world? Why had they taken and hidden various pieces of equipment? What exactly had the launching of those probes set in motion and what can the ultimate conclusion to this quest for survival be?

The game's basic structure is that of a guerrilla war, slowly acquiring items and weapons until you're powerful enough to actually reach and engage in the final confrontation. Each additional munitions pack makes you stronger, while the enemy

until this item is collected, but overall it adds nothing to the sequence of gameplay events. It's one of many superfluous little touches which builds atmosphere and sets up the nature of things ahead; progress is halted or staggered until the necessary items have been acquired.

Weapons are suitably powerful and diverse, comprised of screen-filling Power Bombs, Standard Missiles, Homing Missiles, a Gatling Cannon, Flame Laser and Particle Blaster. For each of these there were five ammo canisters to be found as well as energy tanks to collect, making methodical

THE GAME'S BASIC STRUCTURE IS THAT OF A GUERRILLA WAR. EACH ADDITIONAL MUNITIONS PACK MAKES YOU STRONGER, WHILE THE ENEMY GETS WEAKER

gets weaker. The pacing of these items is implemented in a way to encourage exploration and give players a sense of real achievement. From the opening the Terragator unit is limping, but less than a minute later a repair kit is found and normal walking is restored. Progress can't continue

exploration of each area worthwhile. There's also a degree of non-linearity to exploration, and by the time you acquire the Double Jumper no area should be beyond reach.

The graphics make clever use of 3D, with hidden passages and areas. These never frustrate due to the cleverly implemented



» An area to recharge all your energy and missiles. Wait, didn't *Super Metr...* Okay! We'll stop with the comparisons



» While you were unconscious for god knows how long, someone replicated the Terragator unit

WHY YOU MUST PLAY! THE DIVIDE: ENEMIES WITHIN



» The status screen: Weapons, items and probes acquired, plus your current ammo and energy levels.



» Prior to the planet being discovered, there's a short training mission to accustom you to things

map screen. It works elegantly, as all map screens should, and makes the viewing of whole areas easy, making it ideal for noting points of interest that later need exploring. Rather than attempting a fully freeform camera, the game has a fixed camera that can be panned up and down. In conjunction with the map screens, this ensures you are never lost, and are never without an idea of where to go next. It also makes the 3D platforming sections as painless as possible, with only one notable section in the Lava Rift area proving mildly frustrating.

Considering how many other games omit even the simplest of things, it's refreshing to find that the designers have taken into account what normally frustrates gamers. For example, while there are lengthy jumping sections in the slippery Ice Chasms, the actual platforms you are jumping onto have barriers at their sides to stop you falling off. Again, it's these small touches that show that while the team were trying to come close to replicating *Super Metroid's* design structure, they also had an understanding of what wouldn't work. This

helps to make the adventure very satisfying. Those expecting a lengthy and silky smooth 60-frames-per-second adventure might be a little disappointed at the frame rate and slightly short length (around 5 hours), but this doesn't detract from what is an otherwise excellent game, and one which invokes nostalgic recollections of a genuine classic. At its core it may have been an imitation, but when you're imitating the best it's inevitable that some of the original quality will emerge. Play it and discover its greatness for yourself.

LOCATION, LOCATION

The Divide's organic environments are varied and hostile...

PLANET SURFACE

Malfunctioning, desperate, alone, and stranded on a desolate Planet Surface. Cold walls of crude concrete haphazardly criss-crossed with pipes greet you, while the background music is eerily reminiscent of Meridia.



FOREST CANYON

There's constant rain as lightning blisters the sky above, and enemies home in on you. The forest contains many essential items, but you'll have to navigate the maze of branches found high above.



JUNGLE GORGE

Decayed ruins cover the landscape, created by civilisations that don't exist – except in the depraved nightmares of the possessed creatures wandering throughout. Amid the vine covered pillars, beware of crumbling platforms.



ICE CHASMS

In freezing temperatures far too low for even machines like the Terregator unity, there manages to survive a great many evils. To succeed against them you will need the heating unit, but who knows where it lies?



DESERT ARROYO

The searing wastes of the Arroyo desert is home to unnatural forms of organic and machine transmutations. The temperature reaches 200 degrees Celsius, making the cooling unit essential for survival.



LAVA RIFT

Rivers of lava flow beneath metal spires and platforms – the enemies are immune to the molten slag but you are not, so avoid falling in. Down below, beneath the behemoth structures, lies an enemy and an old friend.



» This handy transport machine removes the need for backtracking long distances



» A scorching area that can cause overheating?

KNOW YOUR FOE Just a few of the lesser creatures that you fight.



SKRIT



KIMPH



FOREST MOLE



DOZER



KRITAH

MOST SECRET

★★★
THE MAKING OF

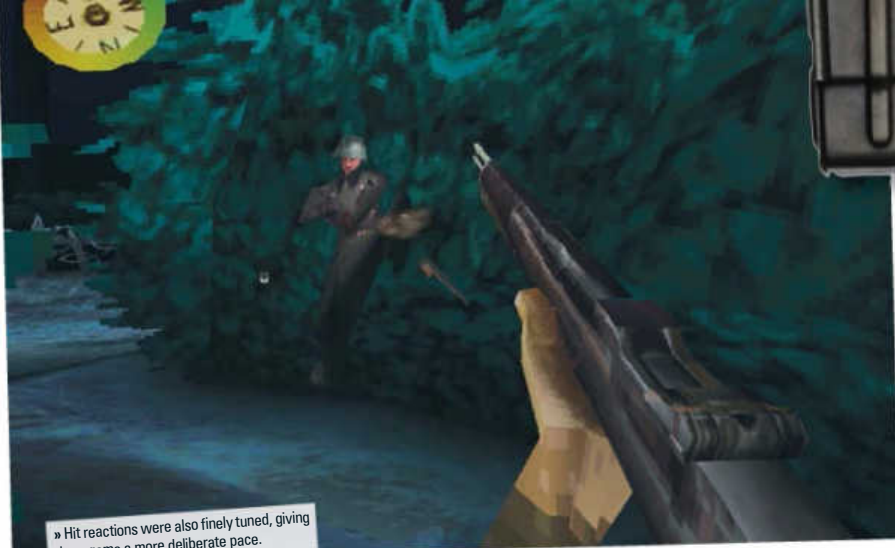
MEDAL OF HONOR

It is one of the PlayStation's longest running franchises and was overseen by none other than Steven Spielberg himself. Ed Smith talks to the men who proved that it was possible to treat war with the utmost respect

» There's a variety of weapons, so make sure you always have the best one for each situation.

» Being hit with a bazooka shell would spell an instant death.

» Objectives, like sneaking about a U-boat in disguise, were integral to *MOH*'s level design.



» Hit reactions were also finely tuned, giving them game a more deliberate pace.



By the time work started on *Medal Of Honor*, the Second World War had been over for 52 years. The top-grossing films were *Titanic*, *Men In Black* and *Jurassic Park: The Lost World*, and the videogame charts were dominated by *Quake* and *GoldenEye 007*. This was before *Saving Private Ryan*, before *The Thin Red Line*. Though war drama was about to have a big resurgence, in 1997, it wasn't in vogue.

Similarly, the PlayStation was still finding its feet. Sony's first console had sold well, shipping around 25 million units worldwide, but the catalogue of games was dominated by just a few genres. *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy VII* were the biggest hits that year, along with *Tekken*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *PaRappa The Rapper*. A studio called Insomniac had just shipped its *Doom* clone, *Disruptor*, over to Japan, but apart from that, on PlayStation the first-person shooter was yet to break through.

So Dreamworks Interactive, founded by Steven Spielberg and comprised of only 30 people, had a challenge on its hands. Not only did it want to reintroduce war history to the mainstream, but also build a sophisticated first-person shooter on an as yet untested platform. Peter Hirschmann, *Medal Of Honor's* writer and producer, remembers the early stages of development:



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:**
ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:**
DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION

» **GENRE:**
FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

"*Medal Of Honor* kicked off officially on 11 November 1997, when Steven returned from Europe after wrapping principal photography on *Saving Private Ryan*. He wanted to teach a new generation about World War Two, but knew his movie would be too intense for younger audiences. His insight was to reach young people through a medium they'd embraced: videogames

"Looking back it's ridiculous, but the idea was controversial at the time because he was proposing an FPS that didn't have high-tech weapons or take place on another planet. And this was before WW2 had come back into

the public consciousness, before *Ryan* and before Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*.

Plus, we only had 2Mb of memory, so forgetting even the broader context of WW2, we first had to figure out how to deliver a fun shooter experience. Not to compare ourselves to *Jaws*, but Steven said that not having a shark that worked all the time forced him to get creative. The same went for our team."

Nobody was more aware of that than Christopher Cross, *MOH's*

lead designer. To accommodate the scale of *Medal Of Honor* on PlayStation, he and fellow designer Lynne Henson had to pull a lot of tricks, as he tells us. "The idea to do a first-person shooter on the PlayStation was f**king crazy. These days you think of someone using, say, the Unreal Engine and

building a whole level by themselves. We couldn't do that. We had to be very careful with the amount of polygons we used because of the hardware.

"An enemy in *MOH* is maybe 200 polys – today, they don't even make hats that are less than 200 polys. So, we could only have four enemies on the screen at once. We had to work with smoke and mirrors so players wouldn't notice the enemies were backfilling. Also, we had to cut skyboxes. That's why every level takes place at night. In the end, though, that kind of worked out, since you're playing an OSS officer doing secret missions. It added a lot of atmosphere."

That wasn't the only instance where technical boundaries actually aided *MOH's* development. As design work

went on, Christopher, contrary to his initial reaction, discovered the PSone was well suited to a war FPS.

"The analogue controller was announced before we launched but we didn't design around it because we couldn't guarantee it had market penetration, so we were using the D-pad. That gave the games a really deliberate pace, since we were tuning them to the directional buttons. We had to allow time to set up the situation, to show that, say, there are three guys coming, there's cover over here, a gun on that wall. We let players figure out the situation and decide how to approach it.

"Plus, killing enemies was never meant to be an objective, never meant to be something you had to do to finish a level. Modern games have these cardboard cutouts popping up all the time – it's just a test of your switch skills. With *MOH*, you'd need to shoot one guy in the foot, one guy in the hand then one guy in the head, then come back to the other two. It was a much slower paced game. It was a lot more intimate."

THE REAL MEDAL OF HONOR

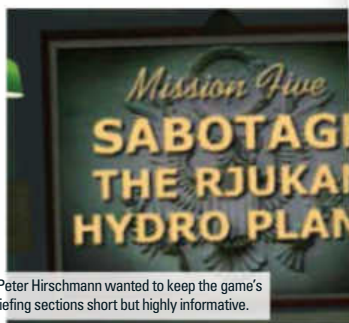
Though he now works for Nexon – the free-to-play publisher launching Cliff Bleszinki's next game, *BlueStreak* – Christopher Cross has a neat idea for a new *Medal Of Honor*:

"It'd be based on real *Medal Of Honor* recipients, because some of their stories are amazing. There's one guy, John Robert Fox, who was a forward observer during a siege by German troops on a town in Italy. He was calling in artillery and basically, for him to actually stop the advance of the German column, he had to call in an artillery strike on his own position. They warned him that he could die but he did it anyway, and then later they found his body. That would have been an amazing mission, putting you in the position where you realise, off the top of your own head, that you have to do this and you'll probably die."



» The OSS was used as a backdrop, since it gave *MOH's* writers context to the send player all across Europe.





» Peter Hirschmann wanted to keep the game's briefing sections short but highly informative.

► Just as Christopher found a way to make the PlayStation hardware work for *MOH*, Peter Hirschman turned the daunting task of creating an educational war game to his favour. With Spielberg's brief in mind, he had the responsibility to make *Medal Of Honor* historically accurate without compromising its entertainment value. The more he wrote and researched, the more he found that one aspect complemented the other.

"It was key to provide as much historical context as possible," he says. "Absolutely, there was a concerted effort to give *Medal Of Honor* an educational quality, but it almost felt subversive. I didn't want to scare anyone into thinking it was anything but a game. First and foremost, *Medal Of Honor* was meant to be entertainment.

"From a story perspective, it was all about backing into it. We needed someone whose initial combat experience matched the player (ie they had none), but yet had a legitimate reason to be in the European Theater of Operations in 1944. So Jimmy Patterson was a C-47 pilot, shot down behind enemy lines. We needed a context to move him all around the continent. So bam, he's recruited into the OSS. That allowed us to cover a lot of ground. To



» Sometimes a simple gun isn't enough to get the job done.



this day, I imagine we're the only game that had mission objectives varying from sabotaging V2 rockets to saving a rare edition of the *Canterbury Tales*."

Just as the absent skyboxes and minimal enemies gave *Medal Of Honor* its atmosphere, the authentic World War backdrop distinguished it from other shooters of the Nineties. The game had a distinctive flavour. It lived on the principal that truth was better than fiction. "I think people actually love to learn history," says Peter. "And working with constraints will often push you to a better place. Instead of fighting the limitations, you embrace them and get to work."

But it wasn't all plain sailing. Despite the pioneering *GoldenEye*, objective-based first-person shooters were still

uncommon in the Nineties. *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Doom* and *Quake* challenged players to simply get from one end of a level to another – there was no need to program in things like bombs, collectibles or stealth mechanics.

That put Christopher on the horns

of a dilemma. If *Medal Of Honor* was to have this broad, authentic-feeling narrative, he and the other designers needed to find ways to make all these objectives – from sneaking aboard a U-boat to sabotaging it with dynamite – flow together. It meant a lot of scripting work and, again, getting creative with the PlayStation's hardware.

"Lynne did most of the paper designs for levels. I reviewed those, handed them off to the artists then took them back and started to add in the gameplay

elements. We'd walk through the maps saying 'we're going to do this objective here, have the rail-gun here' and so on. It was very organic. But then we had to develop a scripting language that could send messages between objects in the game, something to tell an objective when it was complete or when bombs had been picked up – things like that. Things got complicated. The Wolfram level for example had lots of objectives. That meant the level couldn't exist 100 per cent in memory – it was too much. So we had to stream it all off the disc, which meant breaking the world up into compartments, so that when you walked between areas, parts of the level would load and unload in front and behind you.

"But, of course, all of the scripts still had to be associated with an object, so in that one level on the boat, the key was at the front, the door was at the back and because of the loading and unloading, when you picked up the key it didn't unlock the door because the door didn't exist – it hadn't loaded. The game didn't have an inventory, so we had to come up with a lot of creative ways to get around that."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE NEVERHOOD

SYSTEM: PC

YEAR: 1996

SKULLMONKEYS

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

YEAR: 1997

BOOM BLOX (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: WII

YEAR: 2008

“INSTEAD OF FIGHTING THE LIMITATIONS, YOU EMBRACE THEM AND GET TO WORK”

Christopher Cross

» Dale Dye, Spielberg's technical advisor on *Saving Private Ryan*, would later join the *Medal Of Honor* franchise.



After almost two years in development, *Medal Of Honor* launched in October 1999. With the fundamentals now in place, Dreamworks was free to follow it up with a sequel, *Medal Of Honor: Underground*, less than 12 months later.

Alongside *Saving Private Ryan* and latterly *Band Of Brothers*, *MOH* spearheaded the resurgence of WW2 history

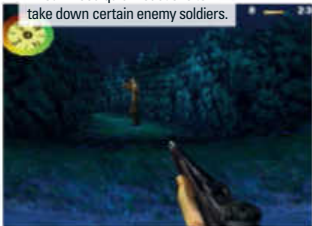
in popular culture. Christopher would go on to head up design on *Medal Of Honor: Frontline*, while Peter became EA's project lead on the PC-only *Allied Assault*. Two guys working for him, Jason West and Vince Zampella, would eventually break off and form their own World War Two franchise – *Call Of Duty*.

Now, 15 years and three generations since Dreamworks embarked on its great crusade, Christopher worries that the war game has gone backwards: "In *Medal Of Honor*, you were going into Germany, and you'd find the Germans sitting around a fire or taking a pee, because this was their home – this is where they were stationed. You could see a backpack propped up or something on a bench. We didn't just popcorn-spawn 50 guys.

"The intention was to make you feel like 'I f**ked up that guy's day' or 'those guys were just eating soup, damn'. It had to feel like it was them or you, not that there were ten more things between you and the next movie moment.

"We wanted people to have some connection to the Germans, which in turn would give every situation a sense of gravity. But in modern games, in the interest of speedy asset creation, they put gas masks on enemies and stuff like that. They dehumanise them. To actually do a reboot of *MOH* in the old mould, you'd need storytelling chops. But I think the monetary and market forces on these games now makes something with a bit of gravity destined to fail. This is why World War Two shooters still make sense. You know the Allies win and that the world is a better place for it, and that makes a big change about your attitude towards your own actions. It means more than just watching the Eiffel Tower blow up or whatever." ★

» You'll need quick reactions to take down certain enemy soldiers.



SPIELBERG ON THE SMALL SCREEN

There are plenty of games based on the movie mogul's films



ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

FORMAT: Atari 2600 YEAR: 1982

■ Commonly described as one of the worst games ever made, hundreds of thousands of unsold copies of *ET* were eventually consigned to the Atari landfill site in New Mexico, which was excavated in 2013.



INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

FORMAT: Various YEAR: 1985

■ A rock-hard platformer, *Temple Of Doom* is notable for its licensed John Williams score, and voice clips from Harrison Ford. They're digitised, though, so they sound a bit rubbish.



JAWS

FORMAT: NES YEAR: 1987

■ This 8-bit adaptation of the original summer blockbuster combines action and RPG-elements, as you kill smaller sharks to upgrade your skills before taking on the daddy: Jaws himself.



INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE ACTION GAME

FORMAT: Various YEAR: 1989

■ One of the earlier LucasArts efforts, this platformer for the Spectrum and various others featured a punishing final level where players had to race to find the Holy Grail.



HOOK

FORMAT: Various YEAR: 1992

■ There were several games based on Spielberg's pirate adventure, the most famous being a side-scroller for SNES, Genesis and Game Gear. The publisher, Sony Imagesoft, would later merge with Sony Interactive.



THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK

FORMAT: PlayStation, Saturn YEAR: 1997

■ This was the second Dreamworks game based on *Jurassic Park*. Also worth looking up is *Jurassic Park: Trespasser*, which features the most bizarre aiming controls ever.



MINORITY REPORT: EVERYBODY RUNS

FORMAT: Various YEAR: 2002

■ It's strange this got panned the way it did. Developed by Treyarch, of *Call Of Duty* fame, and published by Activision, it also had an original score by *Hitman* stalwart Jesper Kyd.



JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME

FORMAT: Various YEAR: 2011

■ After securing a licence deal with Universal, Telltale, maker of *The Walking Dead*, produced this four-part episodic adventure game focusing on events before, during and after the 1993 blockbuster.



THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN: THE SECRET OF THE UNICORN

FORMAT: Various YEAR: 2011

■ Ubisoft Montpellier launched this to tie in with Spielberg's underrated adaptation of the famous Belgian comic. A sequel to that movie is reportedly in the works.



What do you get when you strap a rocket launcher to a car? One of the PlayStation's most memorable cult classics, of course! Nick Thorpe revisits the long-running series with David Jaffe and Michael Riccio...



» David Jaffe

» Michael Riccio

Gridlock is the quickest route to anger. We don't have any data to back that up, but trust us, it's true. Even in a place as accustomed to queuing as the UK, the simple act of waiting in line inspires explosive rage when experienced from the inside of a machine designed specifically for the act of moving fast – and this afflicts everyone from boy racers to mild-mannered anger management experts. Given that fact, you might not be surprised to hear that vehicular mayhem of long-running PlayStation franchise *Twisted Metal* has its roots in a traffic jam.

"Myself, Mike Giam, and Allan Becker at Sony Imagesoft had gone out to Evans & Sutherland, who were the pioneers of real-time 3D graphics," explains David Jaffe, co-creator of the *Twisted Metal* series. The company was best known as a producer of military simulations, but had become sought



"TWISTED METAL 101"

■ Each *Twisted Metal* game depicts a vehicular combat tournament, in which drivers compete to be the last man standing by destroying their opponents with machine guns, missiles and all manner of special abilities. The winner is granted a single wish by the mysterious tournament organiser, Calypso, whose abilities seem to defy reality.



» The original *Twisted Metal* took place solely in Los Angeles, a nod to the game's conception.

“I was in the depths of despair, you know, like, ‘what the f**k, I’m finished before I start!’”

David Jaffe

► by game developers for its expertise in 3D visuals. “We had never seen games and interactive spaces like that, so our minds were swimming with possibilities. On the way back, being at the LAX airport, being in all the traffic and stuff it was like ‘oh, rocket launchers on cars’, very standard fantasies when you’re stuck in traffic and grew up with films like *Road Warrior*...”

Mel Gibson’s post-apocalyptic adventure was just one of a diverse set of influences that David and the team drew upon. “We were inspired by car chases from great action movies, *Car Wars* from Steve Jackson Games and things like *Autoduel*,” notes the designer. Turning that into a videogame wasn’t hard, either. “Merge that with the sensibilities both mechanically and thematically of *Mortal Kombat*, which we were really into at the time – *Mario Kart* battle mode was a big influence as well.” This initial concept became the formula for *Twisted Metal* – drive around 3D environments, blow up other drivers and be the last man standing, with the winner receiving a single wish from the enigmatic tournament organiser, Calypso. These wishes went horribly wrong for their recipients, more often than not.

Twisted Metal wasn’t the only game that SingleTrac was developing for Sony at the time, as *Warhawk* was also being developed by the team. “There were two separate teams, but there was a lot of cross-pollination,” David explains, “effects were shared, sounds were shared, massive swathes of code were shared. You’ll see Warthog in *Twisted Metal* has swarmer missiles that are the exact swarmer missiles from *Warhawk*.” However, as development wore on it seemed as if *Twisted Metal* was destined to flop. “*Warhawk* was really the golden child for the longest time. We did one focus test and they all loved *Warhawk* and they just thought *Twisted Metal* was utter shit, and I was like ‘that’s it, my career’s over.’” Players weren’t the only ones who didn’t seem to care for the game either, as the developer recalls. “I remember Worldwide Marketing came in, and we were showing them all the games and they could not have cared any less for *Twisted Metal*, but *Warhawk* came up and it was like ‘oh my god, this is amazing’ and I was in the depths of despair, you know, like ‘what the f**k, I’m finished before I start!’”

Despite the pre-launch concerns, *Twisted Metal* was a success both critically and commercially. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* crowned it 1995’s Game Of The Year, a strong accolade which capped off a set of reviews which were good, but expressed some reservations. *Play* awarded the game 78%, commenting that the multiplayer combat “provides the kind of laughs you’d expect when you get to murder your friends in cold blood,” but expressed disappointment with the game stating that it “only lasts a bit longer than the average motorway snarl-up.” *Twisted Metal* became a fixture of college dorms in North America and went on to sell over a million copies in that territory, though sales elsewhere were less impressive.

Before these results were in, the team was already looking to do a follow-up project, though as David remembers it wasn’t strictly a sequel to *Twisted Metal*. “We knew we wanted to work with SingleTrac again because it had been a really good relationship and it was a great developer, but we were convinced that *Twisted Metal* was going to be a ‘dead in the water’ title because we thought the physics were too wonky and the controls were too esoteric.” To solve these problems, the team explored a variety of different concepts that moved away from the use of conventional vehicles. “We had a flooded New York City with a Statue Of Liberty and hover-taxis travelling around it, and the reason we did that was so we could get strafing into the game, which at the time was a much more accepted, understandable way to use the controller. We also explored making them insects, so they were going to become like an insect fighting game so we could slow the speed down. Obviously once [*Twisted Metal*] hit the market and found a legion of fans, at least in America, that all went out the window.”

Twisted Metal 2: World Tour was a sequel that implemented the usual improvements such as better visuals and larger stages, this time themed around international cities, but offered a lot more besides. Each level was more interactive, with plenty of secrets to discover. A two-player co-operative mode was also added to the game, providing a welcome addition to the excellent competitive multiplayer of the original. However, the biggest

» Manoeuvrability is placed ahead of realism in *Twisted Metal*’s handling model, enabling players to quickly face threats.



WARPED WARRIORS

Meet some of the most memorable combatants to engage in the Twisted Metal tournament's automotive aggression



MR GRIMM

■ With all the death inherent in Twisted Metal tournaments, it's natural that the reaper himself should be interested. He's no longer in the business of ferrying souls to their destination, and has now become hooked on devouring them. Controlled by his hunger, Mr Grimm's wishes always involve his dark cravings.

NEEDLES KANE

■ Sweet Tooth's driver is the face of *Twisted Metal*, appearing in every game with his iconic mask and flaming head. The events of the games often revolve around this psychotic killer – indeed, at times it is implied that the tournament is the product of his broken psyche, and that he is the natural heir to Calypso. His wish changes in each game.

CARL ROBERTS

■ At the conclusion of the first game, Outlaw's driver, Sergeant Carl Roberts, attempts to deliver the people of LA from the destruction of Twisted Metal by wishing to live in a world without the tournament – only to be sent to outer space. Having been rescued by his sister, Jamie Roberts, he is determined to stop Calypso once and for all.

change to the gameplay was the addition of advanced moves, which added to the depth of the game by enabling players to activate defensive and secondary offensive moves at any time via button combinations.

Released in 1996, *Twisted Metal 2: World Tour* represents one of the high points for the series. As well as once again exceeding a million sales in North America, the game was well-loved by critics, with a 9/10 from the *Official PlayStation Magazine UK* representative of the overall feeling towards the game. David also considers it to be the high water mark in terms of gameplay, stating, "out of all the games I've ever worked on, that's the only game I can go back to and genuinely be engaged in the moment to moment mechanics of the game." However, sales outside of North America were again disappointing, so the remainder of the PlayStation entries in that series were exclusive to that region.

Following *Twisted Metal: World Tour*, the original creative team behind the series disbanded and development was passed to Sony's 989 Studios as a result. David remained at Sony but moved on to other projects, while SingleTrac and Sony parted ways as the developer felt that it wasn't receiving adequate rewards based on the success of the series, removing key creatives such as Scott Campbell and Kellan Hatch.

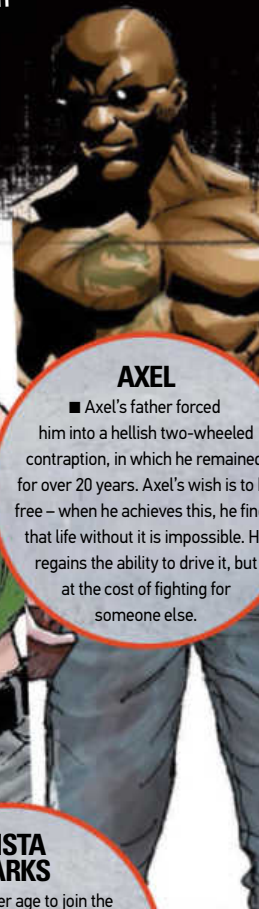


KRISTA SPARKS

■ She faked her age to join the Twisted Metal tournament, with no wish other than to meet Calypso – the father she thought dead. If the driver of Grasshopper can win the tournament and her desired reunion, the revelations are bound to be explosive!

AXEL

■ Axel's father forced him into a hellish two-wheeled contraption, in which he remained for over 20 years. Axel's wish is to be free – when he achieves this, he finds that life without it is impossible. He regains the ability to drive it, but at the cost of fighting for someone else.



MARCUS KANE

■ Roadkill's driver has been homeless for years. As a conspiracy theorist, he believes that the world of *Twisted Metal* is not real and desires to return to a normal life. Given his surname, we suspect that he might not be who he thinks he is.



» FMV endings were filmed for *Twisted Metal*, but was soon dropped as they ended up offending key developers.

» Moving the sequel out of LA allowed for much more diverse environments, like this one.

► Programmer Michael Riccio, who now works alongside David Jaffe at The Bartlet Jones Supernatural Detective Agency, was part of the *Twisted Metal* team at 989 Studios.

The change of developer brought a fresh start for the series. "It was a completely new engine, no code was shared between *Twisted Metal 2: World Tour* and *Twisted Metal III*," Michael explains. One of the most heavily-promoted features of the new engine was its *TruPhysics* engine, which had come across from another PlayStation game. "The lead programmer, Jim Buck, had worked on *Rally Cross* and had a vehicle physics simulation. It was basically Jeil-O physics, it was a cube with with springs connecting the vertices, which is old news now but at the time it was a real innovation. So he brought a lot of the *Rally Cross* engine to *Twisted Metal III* – heavily modded, but physics came over, which was kind of controversial for the game players. They expected exactly the same feel as *Twisted Metal* and *Twisted Metal 2*, but the game was fundamentally different."

That wasn't the only change. *Twisted Metal III* introduced a four-player mode which was very welcome indeed, but other differences weren't quite so enthusiastically received. "We didn't have the sick, twisted David Jaffe involved in it, so the tone was tempered somewhat," Michael explains, as the comedic tone of the game took precedence ahead of the darker aspects of the story, introducing a number of new characters including Granny Dread and Keith Flint lookalike Damien Coles. The game also included a licensed soundtrack for the first time, drawing on popular industrial metal artists Rob Zombie and Pitchshifter.

Twisted Metal III launched to a poor critical reception in October 1998. The soundtrack was heavily praised and the visuals received a mixed reception, but reviewers complained that the game's level design was of a low standard and that the new physics model was detrimental to the game, due to the frequency with which your car would flip over. The majority of critics suggested that players try competing titles such as *Vigilante 8* and *Rogue Trip* instead, but *Twisted Metal III* managed to sell well regardless, again shifting over a million copies.

Twisted Metal 4 was developed to a punishing schedule, as Michael recalls. "We had a year, but the reality was normal hours for the first six months and then just crunching, working weekends – it was brutal." The tough schedule took its toll on the staff – "I wouldn't say that everyone liked each other after the project was done," laughs Michael. "But we got four months off at the end, so it was worth it at that age." The fourth game in the



THE SCRAPYARD

These *Twisted Metal* concepts were broken down for parts before hitting the shelves...

Over the years, details have emerged regarding various scrapped *Twisted Metal* projects. The first of these was *Twisted Metal: Harbor City*, a PlayStation 2 sequel to *Twisted Metal: Black* which was started in 2003. Though the game was scrapped, four stages and a new character, Severed Sam, had been completed, and the remnants of the game were included in *Twisted Metal Head-On: Extra Twisted Edition* as *Twisted Metal Lost*. This was accompanied by a story which explained that the game was left unfinished due to the deaths of six key members of the team – though this turned out to be fake. Other scrapped concepts were intended for the PlayStation 3. The first was *Twisted Metal: Apocalypse*, a game for which some design work exists, including art of Needles Kane in a gas mask. This wasn't to the taste of co-director Scott Campbell, who isn't a fan of post-apocalyptic themes. Another theme involved a more urban style, with more realistic depictions of characters as gang members. Neither of these concepts made it to any kind of playable product, with the PlayStation 3 *Twisted Metal* eventually taking a relatively traditional approach to the established narrative of the series.



» Competitors introduced in *Twisted Metal III*, such as Flower Power, didn't last long in the series.



» Some of *Twisted Metal III*'s stages featured existing damage from natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions.



SWEET RIDES

Over 50 individual vehicles have appeared in the *Twisted Metal* series – here are some of our favourites

SWEET TOOTH	
SPECIAL ATTACK: Napalm Cone	
HANDLING:	
SPEED:	
ARMOR:	
SPECIAL WEAPON:	



MR GRIMM	
SPECIAL ATTACK: Death Spawn	
HANDLING:	
SPEED:	
ARMOR:	
SPECIAL WEAPON:	



THUMPER	
SPECIAL ATTACK: Megafire	
HANDLING:	
SPEED:	
ARMOR:	
SPECIAL WEAPON:	





A grimy, blackened colour palette set *Twisted Metal: Black* apart from its vibrant predecessors.

“I wouldn’t say that everyone liked each other after the project was done but we got four months off at the end”

Michael Riccio

series brought about a major storyline change, as Calypso was no longer in charge of proceedings – instead, Sweet Tooth driver Needles Kane was running things. The former antagonist joined the cast of playable drivers, alongside a range of new characters such as Pizza Boy and Rob Zombie (yes, *that* Rob Zombie) and retooled versions of old ones such as Captain Grimm. The game also featured more interactive environmental attacks, softened physics and the ability to create your own vehicle.

When *Twisted Metal 4* released in 1999, the reviewers recognised the game as a marked improvement over its predecessor and gave it a more positive reception overall. However, it was definitely good rather than great – IGN’s Marc Nix summed up the overall mood in a 6/10 review, stating “You may have fun, as I did, but you won’t feel a brush with greatness from the once towering *Twisted Metal* series.”

Despite the improvements made by 989 Studios in just a year, the fans were at odds with the 989 Studios team. “There were fan

THE HISTORY OF TWISTED METAL

sites that popped up that were all about the first two games. They slammed *Twisted Metal III* and *Twisted Metal 4*, like they weren’t even part of the series, they were crap,” Michael remembers. “I remember we went to a conference, where Kelly Flock gave a presentation about developing sequels for videogames. We left, and some kid came up to us and was just totally angry, like ‘why did you do this, why did you change that?’ I had never experienced that, a crazy disgruntled fan – I didn’t get exposure to the fans at that time. I thought it was kind of funny, it shocked both of us.” Fortunately for the series, the situation was soon resolved by the formation of Incog Inc., a new studio which was formed primarily of ex-SingleTrac staff. David also returned to the series at this time, so with the original team was back in charge, the continuity and concepts introduced in the 989 Studios games were quickly discarded, never to return.

In the summer of 2001, *Twisted Metal: Black* launched on PlayStation 2. “I was at a point where I was much more interested in the world and the story,” explains David of the dark reboot. Set in a blackened world, the game was framed as a contest between mental asylum patients and featured the darkest story to date, filled with revenge killings and all manner of horrific acts. In fact the story was considered to be too dark for the European audience, which was receiving its first *Twisted Metal* game in five years, and all story content including a full hour of FMV was removed from the PAL release. Even the American scenes were toned down from the original intent – one particular scene featuring newcomer Preacher drowning an infant was considered to be a step too far.

It was a triumphant return for the original team, though. *Twisted Metal: Black* was a critical success, attracting near-universal praise. Reviewers were impressed with the level design, which allowed just about everything to be blown up, maimed or broken in some fashion, and the visual design of the game. Praise was also reserved for the soundtrack, which was filled with original orchestral compositions rather than the licensed tunes of the previous games. Sales were excellent, and the multiplayer portion of the game received an online-enabled release to support the PS2 Network Adapter. However, it isn’t David’s favourite entry in the series to play. “The gameplay, the mechanics of it, I thought were good – we put a lot of work into them as a team – but I think it got too fast for a game like that. It felt better for a lot of people because they felt more like cars, but there were a larger number of people that could sit down and play *Twisted Metal 2* and have a genuine sense of depth. I

AXEL
SPECIAL ATTACK: Supernova Shockwave
HANDLING:
SPEED:
ARMOR:
SPECIAL WEAPON:



MR SLAM
SPECIAL ATTACK: Grab n’ Slam
HANDLING:
SPEED:
ARMOR:
SPECIAL WEAPON:



TWISTER
SPECIAL ATTACK: Tornado Spin
HANDLING:
SPEED:
ARMOR:
SPECIAL WEAPON:



INTREPID EXPLORER

Don't just see the sights – make sure you're the last to see them



STATUE OF LIBERTY

LOCATION: New York, USA
GAME: Twisted Metal 2: World Tour

- You can't get up close to it, but you can trigger a three-part destruction sequence. The first stage lights the torch, the second sees it break away to reveal a bikini-clad lady, and the last destroys it fully.

BIG BEN

LOCATION: London, UK
GAME: Twisted Metal III

- To destroy the Elizabeth Tower (and Big Ben with it), position yourself on the ramp facing the clock and bombard it with missiles – you'll soon bring it crashing down.



TOKYO TOWER

LOCATION: Tokyo, Japan
GAME: Twisted Metal: Head-On

- Given that Tokyo's iconic tower was inspired by the Eiffel Tower, it's natural for the Twisted Metal crew to want to blow it up. A bomb placed underneath the tower will take out TV and radio services for the populous metropolis.



HOLLYWOOD SIGN

LOCATION: Los Angeles, USA
GAME: Twisted Metal III

- The tournament's host city is a wreck by the time its third iteration rolls around, but the iconic Hollywood sign remains intact. One good hit from a missile is all it takes to correct this unfortunate oversight!



GREAT SPHINX

LOCATION: Giza, Egypt
GAME: Twisted Metal III

- Half-buried by the desert sands, the Great Sphinx has clearly been affected by the ravages of time. While you can't outright destroy it, giving the ancient landmark a good whack with a missile changes its facial expression.

EIFFEL TOWER

LOCATION: Paris, France
GAME: Twisted Metal 2: World Tour

- Detonating a bomb in this famous landmark doesn't just look cool. When it explodes, the half of the tower will topple over and create a pathway to the rooftops of Paris.



THE HISTORY OF TWISTED METAL



► think with *Twisted Metal Black* we had reached a smaller group of an already small group of players."

The fifth and final outing on the original PlayStation arrived just a few months after *Twisted Metal: Black*, and stood in sharp contrast to it. As the average age of PlayStation owners was falling, *Twisted Metal: Small Brawl* was a kid-friendly spin-off featuring young drivers battling radio controlled cars in huge environments. With Incog Inc. at the helm, the game returned to the classic *Twisted Metal: World Tour* physics model and it felt more like a *Twisted Metal* game than either of the previous PlayStation instalments. With the PlayStation 2 and *Twisted Metal: Black* on the scene the game passed by largely unnoticed, and contemporary reviews were negative, complaining of poor visuals and uninteresting level design.

The series then went on hiatus for the first time, with a few years passing before *Twisted Metal: Head-On* arrived on the PSP, becoming the first portable entry in the series. The game was a direct sequel to

Twisted Metal: World Tour and once again focused on a range of international locations, with new and iconic locations such as Athens and Rome joining past favourites such as Paris and Tokyo. Vehicles and characters were also generally drawn from the past releases, and *Head-On*'s ending stories continued from those in *World Tour*. The biggest new gameplay addition was the inclusion of mid-stage mini-games which saw players avoiding obstacles against the clock, with unlockable characters and extra power-ups available as rewards.

Twisted Metal: Head-On reviewed well, with similar criticisms as the first game – it was good in single-player but far better with human opposition. Additionally, the analogue control scheme was roundly criticised as being over-responsive and just plain odd, as accelerate and brake were mapped to up and down. An enhanced version of *Twisted Metal: Head-On* entitled *Extra Twisted Edition* was released for the PS2 in North America in 2008, and contained an extra stage and enhanced visuals, as well as a variety of extras for hardcore fans.

The most recent outing in the series was simply titled *Twisted Metal*, and rebooted the series on PlayStation 3. The original outline was for a very minimal experience, as David explains. "We had started a company called Eat Sleep Play, and we had gone to Sony and said 'hey, we want to do a small, downloadable-only version of *Twisted Metal*, we don't think it can sustain a \$60 price point.'" The move seems shrewd in light of how downloadable games have taken off, but this was early in the PS3's life cycle and the market wasn't yet understood. "I remember there were business execs at Sony who were like 'we don't know how that's going to sell, that's not viable, we know how to put things in boxes and sell them.'" With that, David and the team set out to make a final full title.

2012's *Twisted Metal* was another reboot, and was unusual in that the single-player campaign was stripped back to just three characters – Needles Kane, Mr Grimm and a new Krista Sparks unconnected to the *Twisted Metal: World Tour* character. Stories were told through live action FMV cutscenes, a nod to the ones

WRITE-OFFS

Twisted Metal has inspired rivals over the years – here's a few of them...



VIGILANTE 8 1998:

■ Luxoflux's spin-off of *Interstate 76* was arguably the best of *Twisted Metal*'s competitors, thanks to its unique style, excellent visuals, and strong level design.

ROGUE TRIP: VACATION 2012

1998:

■ SingleTrac came up with a unique spin on car combat which sees players carrying tourists to post-apocalyptic sightseeing spots.

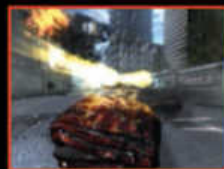


STAR WARS: DEMOLITION 2000

■ Keen to milk the *Star Wars* licence dry, Activision pulled in Luxoflux to create a vehicular combat spin-off with the *Vigilante 8: 2nd Offense* engine.

WWE CRUSH HOUR 2003

■ We're not sure if we needed a WWE vehicular combat game, but Pacific Coast Power And Light thought otherwise.



FULL AUTO 2006

■ Pseudo Interactive reintroduced racing to the genre, as well as an 'unwreck' mechanic which allowed players to rewind time.

which were ultimately scrapped from the original game. The campaign included a variety of different event types, including actual racing events for the first time, but the multiplayer was once again the focus of attention – to the extent that David himself took the unusual precaution of advising players to rent the game if single-player action was their biggest interest.

The first and only PS3 entry in the series received good reviews, with praise for the core action tempered by problems with the online component – *GamesTM* awarded the title 7/10, referencing frequent network errors and an anachronistic interface. Reflecting on the title, David says: "to Sony's credit, *Twisted Metal* came out and I think it wasn't a massive hit, but it certainly did better than we thought it could do at \$60. But it really did stretch development way more than we wanted it to – it ended up being a three-year project, because it was just a long time to make all that content for such a small team." After the release of *Twisted Metal* for PS3, David stated that he had no plans to work on *Twisted Metal* for a very long time, and Sony hasn't given any indication that the series will be appearing on its current platforms. There has also been little news of the film adaptation, which is reportedly being written and directed by Brian Taylor (best known for *Crank* and *Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance*), since it was announced in 2012.

For now then, it seems that the carnage of *Twisted Metal* has finally come to a halt. However, it has certainly left some impressive scorch marks on the landscape of the gaming industry, ranking alongside the likes of *Gran Turismo* as one of the longest-running PlayStation exclusive series, providing a great deal of memorable action and a distinctive cast of characters. And we certainly wouldn't be surprised if the series did make a return in the future – because if there's one thing a dedicated *Twisted Metal* fan knows, it's that Calypso has an incredible talent for getting the last laugh. ★



» Fan favourite real-world locations such as Egypt were revisited in *Twisted Metal: Head-On*.



» Some of the special attacks in *Twisted Metal*, such as the Sweet Bot transformation here, are absurd.



DESTRUCTION DERBY



IN THE KNOW

- » PUBLISHER: PSYGNOSIS
- » DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS INTERACTIVE
- » PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION, PC, SEGA SATURN
- » RELEASED: 1995
- » GENRE: RACING

Where did the idea for Destruction Derby originally come from?

Martin Edmondson and Michael Troughton, my brother, together came up with the concept and design for the game. Martin was a big fan of real-life demolition derbies. We initially pitched it to Sony, along with a technology demo showing that we were more than capable of getting it done.

The game was originally going to be called Demolish 'Em Derby. Why did it change?

I can't remember, but I recall Sony didn't believe, at first, that we'd have the game finished in nine months – it wasn't until around two months from completion that they finally did and they offered us the chance of being a launch title for the PlayStation.

Destruction Derby has been referred to as "low-brow gameplay at its best". Do you agree?

Definitely, yes. That's exactly what we went for when we made it. It was clear to us early on that *Destruction Derby* was going to be a very fun game to play and we just went overboard with it. Some people asked us to make it more realistic but to do so would have been at the expense of gameplay, so I'm very glad that we made it how we wanted to.

Physics definitely gave way to gameplay – how important was this?

Very. When you have 20 cars pushing each other around a track, 'sensible' driving just goes out of the window. We didn't cheat much to help the AI cope with this but the one thing that we did do was to increase the traction for the AI. Without that, they would just be slipping and sliding all over the track.

Arguably the best part of the game was the Bowl, where you and a dozen or so other cars could cause utter chaos...

The Bowl was just something completely different to the track-based derby – a complete free-for-all where

you just had to smash everything possible and avoid being smashed yourself. There were several problems that we had to overcome with the Bowl. The number of collisions, particles, the complexity of the geometry and the number of cars on screen caused us many headaches with the frame rate, of course. Having so many cars trying to smash into you at the same time also created several AI-related issues. Then there's the problem of getting the cars to drive intelligently when their steering is smashed, when they can only turn in one direction and so on – all the problems that the player faced playing the game, we had to have the AI system handle as well. Unlike other games of the era, we didn't cheat with the AI or handling. Just like a human player, the AI could only steer and accelerate/decelerate. It was common in other games to see cars impossibly turning on the spot. We didn't do that.

So what about the Stock Car and Wreckin' Racing modes? Whose idea



THE MAKING OF: DESTRUCTION DERBY



» Race courses were tight, with narrow tracks and evil bends.



It may have only taken nine months to make, but *Destruction Derby* smashed its way into the charts in the mid-Nineties. David Crookes buckles up and chats to programmer Robert Troughton

was it to introduce these sections and was there anything in particular that you wanted to achieve with them?

Wreckin' Racing was the mode that we started with. In this one, you had to combine racing with demolition. You could come first in racing but still lose overall if you didn't smash enough cars. This was really the original plan for the game. Stock Car Racing was added later on as a fairly obvious second mode – removing the need to smash other cars and turning it into a more typical race, albeit one where you could smash and spin out other cars in order to get to first place.

Was programming all of this an easy task, given the quick response and speed of the game?

It was all achieved through sheer determination. We had some of the best PSone programmers that there were working on this. Other teams working for Sony, such as the *WipEout* team, were amazed at what we were doing with the hardware. It

certainly wasn't easy to get it all done and at a good frame rate, but we always loved challenges.

The tracks were narrow, slippery and bordered with walls. How did you draw them up?

We originally planned to ship a level editor with the game – a feature that was dropped due to time constraints. For that reason, it was all built in a very Scalextric style and on an 8x8 grid. When you think of how much estate that gives you to play with, it really isn't much so we'd really limited ourselves as to what we could do with the tracks: small corners (1x1 pieces), large corners (2x2 pieces), crossover (one piece) and straights (one piece) were about all that we implemented, along with narrowing of the lanes. Not only was it difficult to fit many track variations into this system, it was also difficult trying to fit 20 cars onto the tracks as well. Thankfully, the crazily packed tracks actually

benefited the gameplay rather than hindering it.

There was no inside view of the cars, and no speedometer or gear shifting. Why was this?

Time. Again, we'd wanted to do this, but it was dropped in order for us to release the game at the same time as the PlayStation.

So was the lack of choice of cars or mechanical options deliberate too?

Partly. We wanted to keep things simple for the first game in the series but, also, time was against us.

How much of an influence did *Destruction Derby* have on your gaming life?

It was amazing. *Destruction Derby* was the first commercial game that I'd worked on so, to be part of such a small team and to create something that would be so successful was amazing. It's something that I'd love to have the chance to do again.



PLAY IT AGAIN

One of the great features of *Destruction Derby* was its replay editor. Given the chaotic nature of the game, it was possible to pull off some wonderful crashes, and it was inevitable that you'd want to play them back. The replay editor let you not only replay your scenes but chop out the bits you didn't like and position the camera in all sorts of ways to really milk the best of moments. It was like watching Eighties television stunts, only you were in control of the action.

"Martin Edmondson, MD of Reflections at the time, saw this as one of the main features. He'd always had a dream to be a Hollywood director, I think. *Stuntman*, a game that Reflections made many years later, was one that he'd often told us about. We'd laughed it off as something that would never work."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DRIVER (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, PC
YEAR: 1999

SHADOW OF THE BEAST

SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, AMSTRAD CPC, C64, MEGA DRIVE, LYNX, MASTER SYSTEM, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1989

STUNTMAN

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2
YEAR: 2002

LOVING LARA CROFT

When Core created Tomb Raider in 1996 it not only unleashed a 3D phenomenon, but also gave the world one of gaming's most iconic characters. Darran Jones charts the cultural rise of the original silicon chick

Lara Croft is the most famous female videogame protagonist in the world. She certainly wasn't the first, and she went through several changes, but she has touched both the gaming industry and the real world, an achievement that very few other videogame characters, with the exception of Mario, Sonic and Pac-Man, have managed.

Thanks to canny promotion on the part of Eidos – something creator Toby Gard wasn't happy about – the rising wave of 'Girl Power', and simply being in the right place at the right time, Lara Croft transcended typical videogame boundaries and in some ways has become even more relevant to the general public than Mario. After all, can you imagine the Italian plumber being used to sell credit cards, Seat or Lucozade on TV, promoting skin cancer awareness or having his own magazine photoshoot? Also can you even imagine a new *Super Mario* film after the atrocity that was *Super Mario Bros* in 1993? Lara has already had two successful films under her belt with a combined global profit of \$196 million, with a third on the way, although it's looking unlikely that Angelina Jolie will be back.

From non-videogame magazine covers to promoting TV channels, and having both a blue plaque and a ring road in Derby named after her – she had 89 per cent of the vote for that honour, if you're interested – she's certainly come a long way since her conception in 1996, and even her creator never anticipated her success.

"It was all a big surprise for everyone," commented Toby Gard when we first had the opportunity to speak to him via a transatlantic call for the launch of *Tomb Raider: Legend*. "I knew [*Tomb Raider*] was good, I knew that what we were making was dynamite, but I didn't expect it to go to number one and stay there for months."

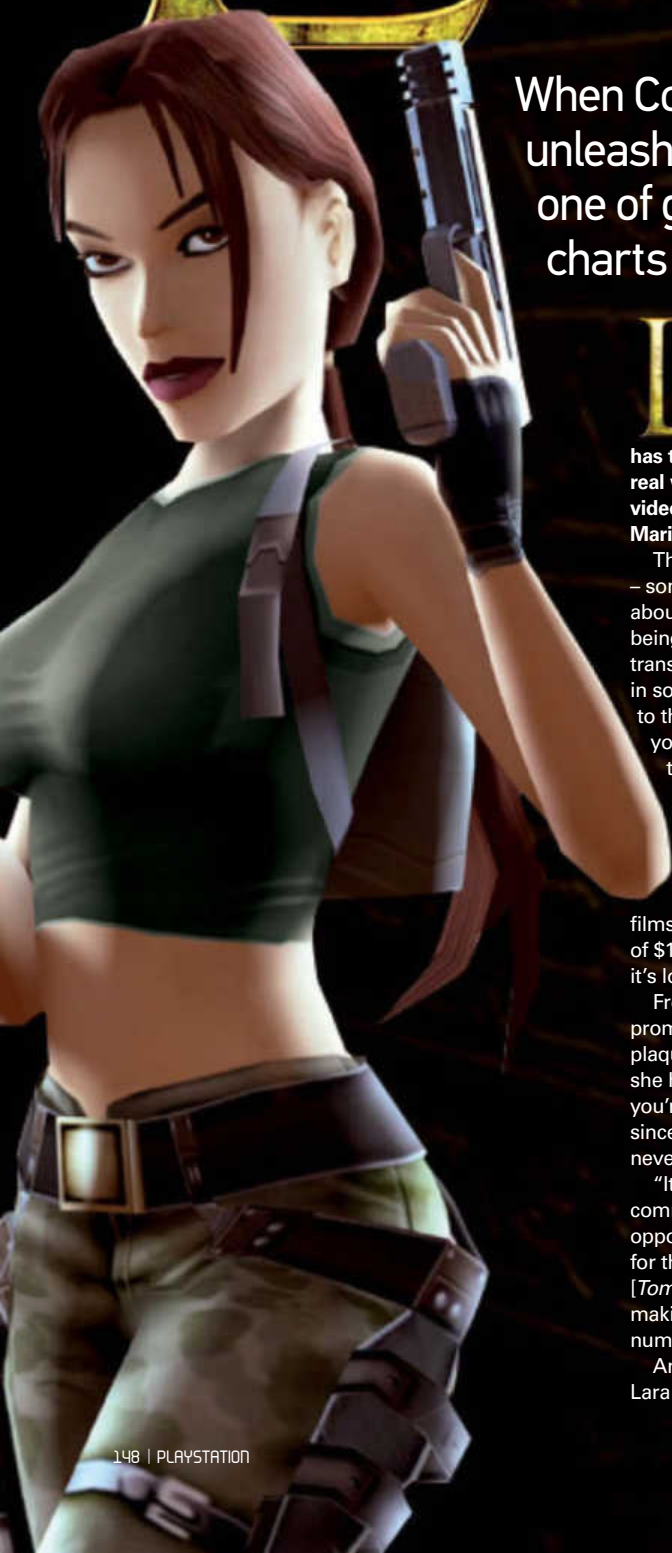
And yet when *Tomb Raider* was created, Lara Croft wasn't even the main protagonist.

Having heard about this for many years, we were keen to find out if this was anything to do with the rumour that *Tomb Raider* started off as *Rick Dangerous 3*. Gard simply gave us an emphatic "No" when we caught up with him again recently, and we also put the question to Jeremy Heath-Smith, one of Core's original co-founders. His reaction was completely different, as he just couldn't stop laughing. "Oh no," he was able to tell us after wiping away tears of mirth. "That never actually happened and I've not heard that before, although it's certainly a nice thought."

So how did Lara come about, then? Realising that 3D was the future and wanting to create a game that was epic in scope and captured the spirit of the best action movies, Gard created a stubbled hero who had more than a hint of the look of a famous archaeologist about him. After presenting his idea, Gard was asked to reconsider his first choice: "I was told I should consider including three other character choices. From there I designed the girl character and I simply couldn't go back."

We asked Heath-Smith why he wasn't keen on using Gard's original creation. "Because it was Indiana Jones," came his reply. "I just looked at him on the screen and I said to Toby: 'It's a great character, but it's Indiana Jones and I have a sneaky suspicion that Spielberg wouldn't be very happy and that he'd sue us. [laughs] The original idea was just too close to an Indy character. So we tried other ones.'"

Even after Gard's protagonist was created, Lara Croft still went through several different changes before he finally settled on a character that everyone at Core was happy with. "I remember taking inspiration from various places and characters at the time like Tank Girl and Neneh Cherry. I looked around at cool characters but not in any one particular place," he recalls. After trying out various ideas for his heroine, Gard





WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



Archer MacLean
What do you think of Lara Croft?

Lara Croft has to be one of the first human type game characters to break out into the real world, with fame assured due to constantly looking like she was about to bust out of her Lycra!

She is certainly a media icon, and after a dozen game titles she's gained enough momentum for Hollywood to make two full-on films, with a third in the making. Short of running for president, how much more famous can you get?

Do you have any fond memories of Lara and Tomb Raider?

Well, I spent ages playing the first PSone version in about 1996, as it was one of the best early uses of texturing in an immersive 3D game, although I kind of got fed up with running, jumping and shuffling along ledges.

However, I do have a personal anecdote from the era. Prior to *Tomb Raider*, my then-publisher, Virgin, wanted me to get away from snooker games and come up with a character franchise, especially one not based on Jimmy White. At the time *Doom* was a major hit on the PC – we're talking 1993/94 – and I came up with a very fully fledged design for a game simply

called *TOMB*, with the hero running around inside pyramids. Some features of that design would still cut it now in 2010. When I presented it to Virgin's management, the first response was that anything Egyptian had always been the 'kiss of death' and my immediate response was: 'Ahh, that's a cool strap line.' Six months later, out comes *Tomb Raider*, and the rest is history.

Also, one of the lads at work got his photo taken at a games show with the pneumatic Nell McAndrew, barely constrained by green PVC. A large print of it and many other 'art pics' ended up stuck to the back of the loo door at work. Last I heard was that he'd emailed Realdoll asking if they could make one for him.

The Adventures Of Lara Croft

Tomb Raider 1996



■ Lara's first adventure had everything: gorgeous visuals, exhilarating set pieces, devilish puzzles and a spunky central character. Add in huge environments to explore and it is little wonder that *Tomb Raider* became such a success.

Tomb Raider II 1997



■ Lara's second outing featured improved visuals, a far greater variety in its locations and a smattering of new moves for its heroine to enjoy. It also enabled Lara to ride a selection of vehicles and was another smash hit for Core Design.

Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business 1998



■ Released to tie in with *Tomb Raider's* Mac release, *Unfinished Business* consisted of the original game and two additional expert chapters. They were created in San Francisco by Eidos.

Tomb Raider III 1998



■ Non-linearity to *Tomb Raider III* meant it was possible to complete stages in a variety of ways. Add in a new save system and a better balance between action and exploration and it was third time lucky for Lara.

Tomb Raider II: The Golden Mask 1999



■ This expanded edition added an entirely separate five-level mini-adventure entitled *The Golden Mask*, in addition to the entire original version of the excellent *Tomb Raider* sequel.



» *Tomb Raider: Legend* was developed by Crystal Dynamics – the first non-Core *Tomb Raider* – and was well-received.

eventually settled on a braided South American beauty named Lara Cruz. Changes from the marketing department at Eidos, which was publishing the game, eventually meant that Lara's surname became Croft and she lost her South American roots and ended up as a member of the British aristocracy. Lara also ended up with a larger bust after Gard accidentally increased it by 20 per cent; the rest of the team liked the change and it was never corrected. Gard became increasingly frustrated with the changes and requests from Eidos and eventually left Core Design shortly after the first *Tomb Raider* was completed.

One thing that many gamers forget is that Lara's console adventures started off on Sega's Saturn and not the PlayStation. Core Design had already proved to be the master of using Sega's Mega-CD, so it seemed like a no-brainer that its first big next-generation game would end up on the Saturn. The deal that Core had in place for Sega wasn't without its problems, however. "The biggest problem we had was that Core had worked out an exclusivity deal with Sega, giving them *Tomb Raider* a full month before it came out on the PlayStation," continues Gard in a recent chat. "Unfortunately, this did mean that the Saturn version ended up shipping with some pretty major bugs, including one that could actually make the game impossible to complete."

Bugs or not, by the time Lara did arrive the hype for her and what she represented was already at fever pitch, with every aspect of the media, videogame or

WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



Martyn Brown

How important was the first *Tomb Raider*?

I think the timing was critical in terms of capturing the imagination of the gaming audience at that time. It also coincided with a relatively strong title, which made for an obviously hugely successful game.

What's your favourite *Tomb Raider* game in the series?

As far as what's the best *Tomb Raider* game, I'm going to stick my neck out and say that *Uncharted 2* does it better than *Lara* ever did!

otherwise, keen to report on the latest Lara news as it developed. The global phenomenon that was Lara Croft didn't really take off until the release of the second game, but such was the scale of the fervour surrounding her, Heath-Smith was in no doubt that Core Design had created a monster.

"I still have the original projections for the first *Tomb Raider* game at Core Design," he begins. "We originally said that we needed to sell around 15,000 copies on the Sega Saturn, another 15,000 on the PlayStation and 5,000 on the PC to make money. The first order eventually came in and it was for 300,000 copies and I was like: 'Oh my god. This is going to be slightly bigger than we thought.'"

For all the focus on Lara, it's easy to forget just what a big deal *Tomb Raider* was when it launched in 1996. While *Super Mario 64* launched in exactly the same year and made Lara look rather cumbersome thanks to Mario's nifty, analogue-controlled athleticism, his 64-bit outing was more like snack-sized bites that you could jump in and out of. *Tomb Raider*, by comparison, felt more like how Gard had originally envisioned: a solid, immersive adventure that other games of the time just couldn't match. The tombs that the globe-trotting Lara investigated boasted fantastic scale that really made you fear for our heroine when you started climbing, while the lush environments were full of detail, further adding to the on-screen immersion. Huge in scope and size – good luck completing it on your first run in less than 17 hours – *Tomb Raider* encapsulated everything that made the adventures of Indiana Jones



» At points, the promotional angle for new *Tomb Raider* games stopped even trying to be subtle.

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation 1999



■ Here's where it started to fall apart. A dull adventure, unimaginative set pieces

and poor level design meant *The Last Revelation* was a disappointment. Playing as young Lara was a nice touch, though.

Tomb Raider Level Editor 2000



■ Only available for the PC, this does exactly as you'd expect and is a fairly comprehensive

level editor. It's helped create a huge and active fan community on the net and is still in wide use today.

Tomb Raider III: The Lost Artefact 2000



■ Sometimes referred to as *Tomb Raider III Gold*, this is a sequel to part III and released exclusively on

the PC. Full of variety, it starts off in the Scottish Highlands and ends up in the catacombs of Paris.

Tomb Raider Chronicles 2000



■ Splitting the main game into smaller flashback levels is a nice touch, but *Chronicles*

feels rather tired. The grappling hook makes an early appearance, and Lara gets a few new moves, but this is a pretty bland effort.

Tomb Raider Starring Lara Croft 2000



■ Despite sharing elements with the original game, *Tomb Raider* on the Game Boy

Color is a completely different adventure with a new plot and 2D visuals. It's the first *Tomb Raider* on a Nintendo console.

so fun to watch. Battling bad guys, facing off against nature itself and plunging into deep, murky pools was all in a day's work for Lara, and while the digital controls that Core had given her let her down somewhat, she was still absolutely fascinating to watch whenever she was in action.

And action was one thing that was high on Lara Croft's agenda. Running around with her dual-wielding pistols, she epitomised the very body of the 'Girl Power' that the Spice Girls had so successfully engineered two years earlier. Once you'd got bored of constantly manipulating Lara so that the camera would zoom in and focus on her amply pointed chest – we all did this, right? – you could simply focus on the gameplay, rolling around like a lunatic, gunning down wolves like an extra from a John Woo film and running like hell when you encountered that terrifying T-rex. With its atmospheric music, strong characters and impressive cut-scenes, it should come as no surprise to learn that Gard's influences had come from the film world, with the works of John Woo being particularly inspiring.

"I'd just seen *Hard Boiled* and I wanted to get that in because I was so excited about the film," continues Gard on that original transatlantic call we had with him. "I wanted to have that kind of dual-pistol insanity going on, with leaping and shooting and stuff. Obviously it was quite a long way off from that in the end, but that was what was pushing the action forward."

The original *Tomb Raider* became an absolutely huge success for Core Design and an impressive achievement, especially considering the team's inexperience in making 3D games. Shifting huge numbers on all formats – particularly Sony's PlayStation, where it fit perfectly with the mature image cultivated

"We wanted to sell 35,000 copies to make money. The first order was for 300,000"

by Sony – it wasn't long before a sequel was announced, and unfortunately for Sega, the poor old Saturn didn't even get a look in.

"There was no question," begins Heath-Smith when we asked him if Sony chased the *Tomb Raider* sequels because it was such a perfect fit for the PlayStation brand. "Sony has gone on record to say that *Tomb Raider* was a cornerstone product to show off what the PlayStation could do. It came about from the success of the first game, the fact that we'd put it out first on the Sega Saturn and Sony were really keen. They approached us and asked if we would be interested [in single-format exclusivity] and we said okay and ended up making a deal that made a lot of sense for all of us. It was phenomenal because it not only sold hardware for them but also sold software for us."

While Core Design buckled down and started planning out Lara's next game, the rest of the world was going absolutely mad for the pony-tailed adventurer. By the time *Tomb Raider II* was released, Lara mania was in full swing. She was appearing on the cover of non-gaming magazines – *The Face* was a particularly memorable example – made headlines on the front cover of *The Times* and, amazingly, she even found time to start a thankfully short-lived pop career. Irish rock superstars U2 contacted Eidos in early 1997, stating that they were keen for Lara to feature in the upcoming PopMart Tour. She made a guest appearance during the tour, with Core creating specific footage to

be shown on the 7,000-square-foot video screen.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about the rise of Lara, particularly when you look at how carefully she's marketed as a brand today, is that her cyber celebrity status wasn't deliberately orchestrated by Eidos or Core Design at all, effectively snow-balling into a global behemoth all by itself.

"If I'm totally honest, that was kind of self-perpetuating," reveals Heath-Smith about Lara's increasing worldwide appeal. "You've got to remember that this was the first major female character in a videogame, so we kind of kept it all under wraps for quite a while because we were just so nervous about the response we were going to get. I remember some press coming to see us and they were looking at some of the other projects we had in the company at the time and we said to them: 'Come and have a quick look at this and see what you think.' They were all like: 'Wow, that's awesome. We need to write about it,' to which we simply said: 'No, you can't.' [laughs] I think what happened was that once this news broke that there was this female character there was this ground swell from all media, and it wasn't just the videogames press. We got blamed for David James losing goals at the England game because he was up all night playing *Tomb Raider*, she was on the front page of *The Face* magazine – she just kind of self-perpetuated. I'd love to say that it was a really dynamic PR machine that kicked into gear, but it really wasn't like that at all."

"To be honest it was all just lucky timing," reaffirms Gard when we recently quizzed him about her meteoric rise to cyber-stardom. "Lara was an unusually strong heroine in one of the first ever third-person games. Because that space was pretty much untrodden by anyone we had the opportunity to do a lot of 'firsts' and that made [*Tomb Raider*] very memorable."

Regardless of how Lara rose to celebrity status, she was now big news. So big, in fact, that she even had a live counterpart to represent her at various shows and press events. While Core Design and Eidos hadn't been behind Lara's meteoric rise, they had come up with the idea to create a real-life Lara – something that still exists today – to act as a spokeswoman for all new games.

"That all came about from going to the big CES show in America," recalls Heath-Smith. "We did a couple of things there, including a digital animation of Lara, where we devised this really clever motion capture stuff. She was on a screen and we were using a camera so that if you walked past she would actually



The Croft Phenomenon

Given how popular the games and Lara became in a relatively short space of time, and because the media took Ms Croft to be the ideal ambassador for the edgy new image that gaming was getting thanks to Sony and its PlayStation, the marketing men were quick to capitalise on the popularity of *Tomb Raider*. Since leaping onto our screens back in 1995, on top of the requisite T-shirts, socks and action figures, Lara has appeared in two big-budget movies, a 50-part comic book series by Top Cow Productions, and a series of novellas published

by Ballantine Books. She was also immortalised on the cover of the culture, music and fashion mag *The Face*, helping cement her status as a true media icon, became the face of Lucozade, appeared in an animated series appearing on the subscription-based gaming portal GameTap, and lent her face to four white-knuckle theme park rides – three of which, though, no longer have any *Tomb Raider* association. Still, how many videogame characters since Lara can boast anything like that level of success and celebrity?

The Adventures Of Lara Croft

Tomb Raider: Curse Of The Sword 2001



■ A far more accomplished Game Boy follow-up that features excellent visuals, a nice

blend of exploration and action and some intriguing puzzles. It's still simple stuff, but nevertheless works a treat.

Tomb Raider Episode 1: The Eye Of Osiris 2002



■ This was a simplistic platformer created for Sky Gamestar. There are a total of ten

levels to explore but tricky controls mean that it's fairly hard to finish.

Tomb Raider: The Prophecy 2002



■ Although it features excellent visuals and plenty of variety, Lara's first GBA

outing isn't really that memorable. Little wonder, then, that no other adventures appeared on the platform.

Tomb Raider Episode 2: The Shadow Falls 2003



■ The follow-up to *Eye Of Osiris* is more of the same, but now has Lara battling her way

through a huge warehouse, *Impossible Mission*-style. Again, controlling it with a TV remote lets it down.

Tomb Raider Episode 3: Armageddon 2003



■ *Armageddon* changes the concept of the original two games by having you finish the final

stage in a tight time limit. It's an otherwise perfect time-waster that suffers like the other games.



» Vanessa Demouy 1997



» Rhona Mitra 1997



» Nell McAndrew 1998



» Lara Weller 1999



» Lucy Clarkson 2000



» Ellen Roche 2001



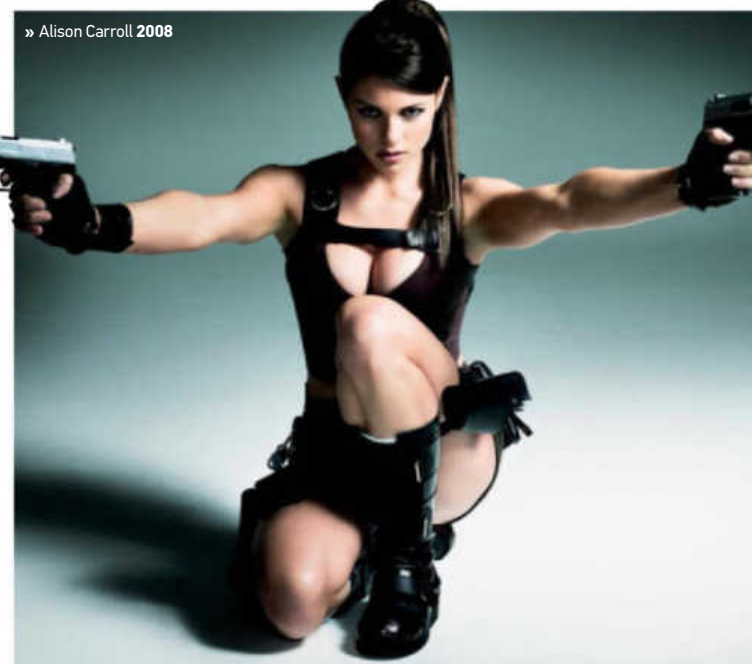
» Jill de Jong 2002



» Karima Adebibe 2006

THE GIRLS BEHIND LARA

■ The first model was Vanessa Demouy, who portrayed Lara from 1996 to mid-1997. Rhona Mitra – who's arguably had the most impressive career post-Lara – carried on the torch to 1998 and so it went on, with Eidos changing the model to usually tie in with the release of a new game – although Nell McAndrew was fired after appearing in *Playboy*, which used Lara Croft without Eidos's permission. The current Lara is Alison Carroll, a gymnast and model who, like Lara stand-ins before her, has had intensive training in order to better understand the role. The impressive number of models that have portrayed her over the years meant that Lara was entered in the *Guinness Book Of Records* for the 'Most official real-life stand-ins'. Over the years costumes have changed to match Lara's latest look, and Nell McAndrew's costume was even donated to UNICEF for a charity auction.



» Alison Carroll 2008

WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



David Wilson

Head of Sony UK PR

Why was *Tomb Raider* so important for Sony in the PlayStation era?

The market was dominated by Sega and Nintendo, but PlayStation carved its own niche by being, frankly, cooler. It appealed to an older demographic.

One of the initial ways it did this was by conscientiously not having a 'mascot'. Sega had Sonic, Nintendo had Mario. Jonathan Ross once made a comment about 'Nintendo Game Boy, Sony Walkman', which seemed fairly apposite. When a mascot finally appeared, it was a different kind – not something that could be perceived as 'childish' but a pneumatic female superstar who was cool enough to feature on the cover of the contemporary style bible *The Face*.

Why does she remain such an iconic character?

Lara Croft was very much of her time – and that's why she maintains cult status. She was hugely popular among the male gamers, but she also crossed over with an appeal to female gamers as well. This may sound naive in hindsight, but Lara rose to popularity in the era of the Spice Girls and Girl Power [as] a girl who was smart, powerful and sassy and more than a match for her male adversaries. She was empowering and also a rarity in videogames, where the hero predictably tended toward the musclebound meathead. Her legacy is possibly not just more female leads in games but also more varied depictions of the male lead.

Simon Pick

Senior software engineer, Electronic Arts

What impact did the first *Tomb Raider* game have on you?

I was annoyed that it was so good! We released *Die Hard Trilogy* at around the same time and I remember standing in the Virgin Megastore on Oxford Street watching a kid playing it and thinking: 'Damn! Why does it have to be so good? No one is going to buy our game now.' On *Die Hard Trilogy* we struggled to create 3D enemies – I was convinced that it was impossible to produce a fully skinned character and keep the frame rate reasonable. Lara proved me completely wrong.

What do you think of Lara Croft as a character?

She proved that you could create a large 3D character that was engaging. Before Lara, game characters were all tiny random characters with no personality. There was a connection with the player that no previous game character had. A few years back I was hiring animators and modellers for a new game, when I walked Lara Croft – ponytail, small round glasses, backpack, khaki pants, the works. It would have been a genius interview technique, had I not been miffed that *Tomb Raider* stole some of our *Die Hard Trilogy* sales! I hope her efforts paid off with a more reasonable interviewer.



Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness 2003



■ Missing numerous deadlines, Lara's PS2 outing felt outdated as soon as it was

released. Riddled with bugs, it has some strong ideas but it just feels like old hat. It was Core Design's last *Tomb Raider*.

Tomb Raider Episode 4: Temple Of Anubis 2003



■ Lara's fourth outing on Sky's Digibox sticks to the same tried and tested formula as before,

with the same number of levels and same gameplay. Needless to say, it was beginning to get tiring.

Tomb Raider: The Osiris Codex 2003



■ Lara's first mobile phone game is surprisingly fun. It's a 2D platformer with plenty

of run-and-gun elements and the odd puzzle to solve. Solid and slick, it's well worth investigating.

Tomb Raider: Quest For Cinnabar 2004



■ This is the second episode of Lara's mobile adventures and it is pretty much business

as usual. Lara is now looking for a new relic, but otherwise it features the same solid platforming as before.

Tomb Raider: Elixir Of Life 2005



■ Lara's final mobile adventure was a fitting send-off, easily building up what had

happened in the previous two games. It was a little more polished visually and a mite tougher, but still highly enjoyable.

» [PSone] The first *Tomb Raider* was a 3D adventure unlike anything before it.



talk to you. It was quite cool at the time but we felt that you needed something more. At the same time Eidos was promoting other games and it just made sense that we had a Lara lookalike who could come out on stage and do photos."

It was now approaching the end of 1998, and *Tomb Raider II* was gearing up for release. While sticking to the proven template of the original game, Core Design nevertheless brought plenty of new additions to the core gameplay, some of which split the original game's fan base. The globe-trotting aspects of the original game remained, but Lara was now able to use vehicles – something that has continued with various degrees of success – on certain levels, and there were far more human opponents to defeat. Where *Tomb Raider* instantly recaptured the spirit of the *Indiana Jones* films, its sequel was a more modern affair, taking place on the waterways of Venice and even an oil rig in the middle of the Atlantic. Some fans voiced their

"Fans began to question whether a year was enough to make a new game"

concerns about the new modern direction that Lara and the franchise was heading in, but the sequel was still a huge success for both Core and Sony, greatly outselling the original and ensuring that Core Design would be in charge of getting another game out in time for the lucrative Christmas season again.

Lara was still enjoying huge success as Core began working on part three, but the cracks of working to such a strict schedule were beginning to show. Early previews of *Tomb Raider III*, while generally positive, were beginning to question whether a year was

enough time to work on a completely new game.

Granted, Lara herself would get many new abilities – monkey swinging being by far the most useful – but, for many, it didn't seem enough.

Hot off her stage appearance with U2 on their PopMart Tour, Lara launched a singing career; or rather, Rhona Mitra launched a singing career using the Lara Croft name. Produced by the Eurythmics' Dave Stewart, the album *Come Alive* was an unbelievably cheesy affair consisting of amazingly poor Europop tunes that did little to enhance Lara's image as a globe-trotting adventurer. Unfortunately for Rhona, debut single *Getting Naked* was a less than

stellar release, causing the one-time model to give up her career and head to Hollywood, where she has since carved a decent career.

It was during the release of the third *Tomb Raider* game that rumblings first began about a Lara Croft movie, although it would be several years later that the eventual film would come along. It was all a blur for Lara, however, and it was becoming increasingly obvious that Core, too, was beginning to run out of creative ideas for the franchise. Lara had always been depicted as a sexy heroine – much to Gard's chagrin, who left after being unhappy with the promotional direction that his creation was heading in – but by the arrival of *The Last Revelation* the focus was starting to be more on Lara than it was her actual adventures. One famous advert featured a girl wearing Lara's familiar crop top and shorts as her boyfriend smugly lay in bed behind her, while the videogames press was spending just as much time talking about her latest outfits as it did about actual gameplay. It looked like the feisty adventurer was getting out of control, and she was becoming in danger of sinking what had started off as a thoroughly enjoyable franchise.

"All franchises tend to go through ups and downs as they try to reinvent themselves and as different people take charge of it," admits Gard when we asked him if he felt like some of Core's later *Tomb Raider* games began to lose their way. "I remember consistently getting into a lot of trouble and fighting over the marketing campaigns for the original *Tomb Raider*, but at the end of the day everyone has a different interpretation of the character, so things are inevitably going to get patchy as things progress."

"That's certainly something of a dilemma," admits Heath-Smith when we put the same question to him. "Is Lara bigger than the actual games or is the game bigger than Lara? If Lara is in a bad game does that end up damaging Lara as a character? My own view now is that she's probably far bigger than the actual games. Although I do think that if it's a bad game it doesn't really matter what character you have in it. I think the movie obviously had a big impact on that because we personally didn't do a game of the movie in case the movie ended up being bad."

The late Nineties passed quickly for both Lara and Core, and while she remained in the public eye – her Larazade adverts were everywhere at one point – the franchise was turning into the very definition of diminishing returns. The games were still proving popular, but gamers were becoming increasingly disillusioned with Lara's adventures, especially when titles like *The Last Revelation* and *Chronicles* still saw her being controlled with all the ugly finesse of a Tesco trolley with a broken wheel. Core certainly tried to shake things up – *The Last Revelation* was the first

The Adventures Of Lara Croft

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider 2005



■ This was Lara's very first video slots outing by

Microgaming. The standard spinning reel action is punctuated by occasional mini-games and it makes for an interesting Lara Croft spin-off.

Tomb Raider: The Reckoning 2006



■ Another side-on quest for Lara that played like

a cross between the Game Boy Color titles and the later Sky Digital games that were released. It was available live in Canada via Bell ExpressVu.

Tomb Raider iDVD Game 2006



■ Utilising Angel Of Darkness footage because

Legend was still in development, this was an interesting attempt to capture the casual market by splicing footage of the PC version with Dragon's Lair-style controls.

Tomb Raider: Legend 2006



■ Crystal Dynamics breathed new life into Lara thanks

to solid combat mechanics, clever use of QTE, and a solid balance between adventuring and exploring. An excellent reboot of the franchise.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Puzzle Paradox 2006



■ Based on elements from Legend, Puzzle Paradox

is a solid little mobile release that borrows from Gremlin's Deflector and Sudoku. Nothing earth-shattering, but good fun all the same.

Lara Croft's Party Poker 2006



■ This is nothing more than poker with Lara's name

attached. You'll battle a selection of Eidos characters – including Gex and Kain – before you get to take on the mad card skills of Lara herself.

“Something was going to have to give. That something was Angel Of Darkness”

time that you could control Lara as a young girl and *Chronicles* depicted Lara's supposed death and was told in the style of flashbacks – but it was becoming increasingly obvious that something was going to have to give. That something was *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, but before Lara's sixth videogame arrived she was busy starring in her first feature film.

Ever since rumours began circulating about a Lara Croft movie in 1998, it was hard to imagine anyone else other than Angelina Jolie starring as the heroine. *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* was released to commercial – if not critical – success in 2001 and starred Jolie as the famous archaeologist, her estranged father Jon Voight as her on-screen father, and Daniel Craig as nemesis Alex West. Despite a largely nonsensical plot, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* turned into an enjoyable movie experience, with a strong turn by Jolie and a very commendable box office. In fact, Lara's first film outing not only became one of Paramount's most profitable openings at the time, but is easily the most successful videogame to film adaptation, with its \$48.2 million opening easily eclipsing the previous record of \$30 million that had been achieved by *Pokémon: The First Movie*.

After grossing over \$270 million from an original budget of \$115 million, a sequel duly appeared in 2003 dubbed *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life*. Sadly, it was even more poorly received critically than the first film and, despite the addition of action maestro Jan de Bont at the helm, didn't perform anywhere near as successfully as the original film. It still made a \$30 million profit, but while Eidos is keen to make a third movie – the latest rumour is a prequel starring Megan Fox in the lead role – nothing else is confirmed.

“The first film was all right but the second one completely lost touch with the character,” explained Gard about seeing his creation on the silver screen.

Eidos was far happier however, with Heath-Smith being particularly pleased about how the movies turned out. “We had a lot of creative control,” he reveals about the deal with Paramount Pictures. “I was executive producer on both films and one of the conditions was that we had veto over script, actors and actresses and exactly how they would portray Lara. At the end of

the day, Lara was our icon and what we didn't want was a movie damaging Lara. I personally had a lot of involvement, from script to directors to cast.”

Although Heath-Smith was able to help guide Lara's big-screen outings, the same magic was not sprinkled on Core's last game. Constantly delayed and finally shipping with numerous bugs, *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* was a massive disappointment for both Core and Eidos, receiving average scores from all corners of the gaming community and causing Eidos to have a massive rethink about the franchise's future.

“I listened to far too many people and there was a huge amount of pressure put on us,” begins Heath-Smith when asked about Lara's darkest videogame moment. “We actually let the marketing people get involved, which was our biggest mistake. We wanted to do an updated version of the original *Tomb Raider*, but they were like: ‘No, you can't do that. We need to bring her into a new age and make her far more interactive.’ Sadly we were just too over-engineered and it was actually thought about too much. It was a shame because the work that was put into that game I can't even begin to tell you. The man-hours in that game were huge, absolutely huge. The biggest problem with it was the controls. We just struggled and struggled with getting the controls right and trying to do so much with her. Again we just over-engineered it. We should have done what we did on the other five games and simply told them all to bugger off. Sadly the commercial



» [PSone] *Tomb Raider II* had surprisingly little actual tomb-raiding, taking in more modern environments.

WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



George Andreas

Design director, Rare

What was the first thing that hit you when you saw *Tomb Raider* for the first time?

How incredibly immersive the overall experience was at the time given the limitations of the hardware. Also, it wasn't really pandering to the other games of its era, it wasn't overtly cute, it wasn't about collecting lots of shiny objects and it wasn't about twitch skill gameplay – it was brave and bold and ultimately succeeded in introducing an original character to the world 'outside' of videogames.

What's your favourite *Tomb Raider*?

For me, the first one. Creating the first of any series is always the biggest creative and development challenge. Defining what that is and executing that to a high level that really resonates with people is no mean feat.

Why does *Lara Croft* remain so popular?

I guess you could ask the same question about some of the other high-profile videogame icons of the same era. Mario and Sonic also remain popular to name but two, regardless of what we may think about the quality of some of their outings over the years. Creating new IP is fast becoming a fading art as the financial risk developers and publishers face is tremendous. So, sometimes it's easier to bring back an old character or give an old franchise a face lift to appeal to new consumers as well as the existing fans of the franchise. That's not to say that the developer can be lazy and throw anything out the door – customers will be just as quick to disown something if the quality is poor as they will be willing to adopt or continue to support a gaming franchise if the game delivers on their expectations.



Tomb Raider Anniversary 2007



■ Taking over from Core Design, Crystal Dynamics

revisited and expanded upon the original game. It's not quite as polished as *Legend*, but remains a fitting tribute to Lara's very first adventure, ably updated.

Tomb Raider: Secret Of The Sword 2008



■ *Secret Of The Sword* was a video slot machine that

featured Lara performing *Tomb Raider*-themed tasks like shooting targets in the bonus rounds. Fans of the series unsurprisingly shouldn't go out of their way.

Tomb Raider Underworld 2008



■ Although Nathan Drake steals Lara's thunder

a little, we really enjoyed *Underworld*. An interesting setting and improved mechanics meant another hit for both Eidos and Crystal Dynamics.

Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light 2010



■ Lara's first co-op adventure is already looking like a

hell of a lot of fun and successfully blends *Robotron*-style controls with some impressive puzzles in a downloadable package. It also looks beautiful.

Tomb Raider 2013



■ After a number of traditional *Tomb Raider* games,

Crystal Dynamics was allowed to shake up the franchise. The end result was a survival horror-based romp with heavy nods to Naughty Dog's *Uncharted* series.

Lara Croft And The Temple Of Osiris 2014



■ Crystal Dynamics delivered another twin-stick

shooter, this time with four-player action. Sadly, it was a ghastly dull affair that failed to capture the clever splice of action and puzzles that the first game offered.



» When Crystal Dynamics rebooted the series in 2013 it completely overhauled Lara's look. She's no longer a sex icon.



» Lara was turned into a survivor for the 2013 reboot called *Tomb Raider*. A sequel, *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*, is out shortly.

stakes that were around then were so huge that we didn't have a lot of choice."

Angel Of Darkness's performance at retail saw the shock announcement by Eidos that the next game in the series would be created by American developer Crystal Dynamics, which was best known for its *Legacy Of Kain* franchise. The news was met by howls of disgust from the fan base, but when *Tomb Raider: Legend* was released in 2006 it turned out to be a damned good reboot. Quick-time events were cleverly segued into the main gameplay and the addition of a new grappling hook proved more than a fancy gimmick, while the available puzzles were also of a very high standard. Lara was back on track, but Core Design had been hit hard by both the loss of its signature character and the Heath-Smith brothers, who departed to form Circle Studios and took a good 70 per cent of Core's staff with them. The company was unable to cope and what was left of it was sold off to Rebellion in 2006.

"To be really honest with you, it was time for a change," admits Heath-Smith about Crystal Dynamics taking over the franchise. "The team had been on that project for six games, which is too many, and it did need a shake-up. The sad part was that the shake-up was in America and at that time I had left, so there was nobody there fighting the corner. I thought it was really sad to lose a British icon to America, but to be fair they've done a really good job and Toby also got re-involved, which was very cool. It is sad, but who knows? Maybe one day we'll get the original team back, secure the game and make another one. That would be quite a headline, wouldn't it?"

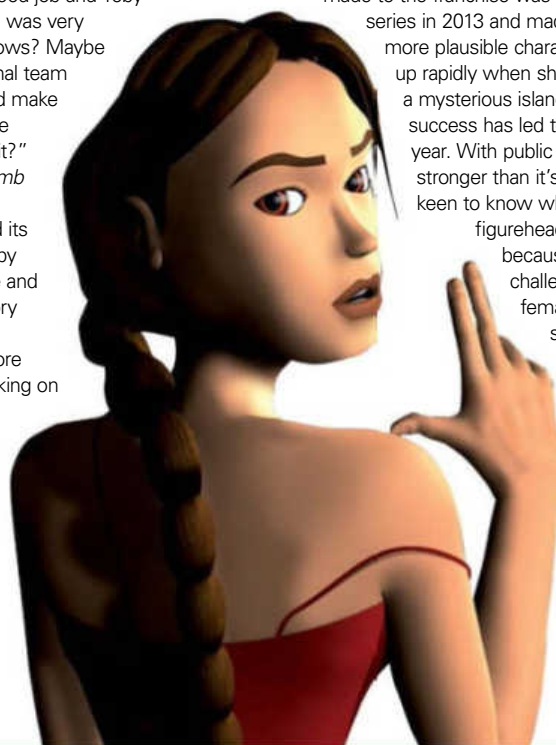
After the success of *Tomb Raider: Legend*, Crystal Dynamics further stamped its authority on the franchise by revisiting the original game and implementing the back story changes that had begun in *Legend*. Interestingly, Core Design had also been working on a tenth anniversary edition of the game for the PSP, but disaster struck when Core revealed early screenshots in June 2006, only for Eidos to announce that it would be created by Crystal Dynamics the following week.

Tomb Raider Anniversary was finally

released in 2007 and proved a fitting tribute to Lara's original adventure. It felt instantly familiar to anyone who had played the original classic, but also contained enough new elements to stop boredom from setting in for even those who had completed the original numerous times. It was followed in 2008 by *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, which was not only a grittier vehicle for Lara but also featured far more underwater action than in previous adventures. Fortunately Crystal Dynamics was more than up to the task, and the end result was another solid adventure that easily built on the building blocks that the developer had first created with *Legend*.

Crystal Dynamics' next game was *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light*, her most interesting-looking adventure yet. It's a downloadable game that introduces many new and interesting play mechanics. The most exciting is the addition of a second playable character called Totec, which greatly changes the core gameplay dynamics and also ensures that you can solve the game's many puzzles in a variety of different ways. Sadly, a 2014 sequel called *Lara Croft And The Temple Of Osiris* failed to get the same response from critics, probably because it bodged the gameplay and had replaced the exciting shooting of the original game with encounters that were dull and unexciting.

The biggest contribution Crystal Dynamics has made to the franchise was when it rebooted the series in 2013 and made Lara Croft into a more plausible character who has to grow up rapidly when she's shipwrecked on a mysterious island in *Tomb Raider*. Its success has led to a sequel, due later this year. With public awareness of Lara now stronger than it's ever been, we were keen to know why she's such an iconic figurehead. "I think it's mainly because no one has ever challenged her and created a female character in the same way," concludes Heath-Smith. "To be honest, bringing out a new female character in today's market is bloody difficult. I don't think it's impossible, but Lara is very much an icon of her time, just like James Bond is, and it's very hard to match that without mimicking it if you're not first to market."





Naughty Dog

From two ambitious school friends to the most creatively significant PlayStation developer of today, Naughty Dog co-founder Andy Gavin talks us through the company's impressive evolution

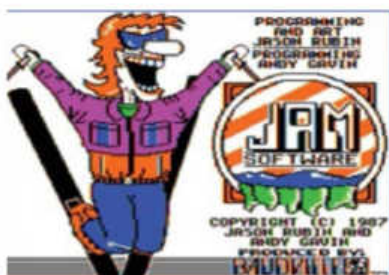
Whatever you were up to in school at age 12, it most likely didn't lay down your career path for the next 20 years. Naughty Dog co-founder Andy Gavin met his future creative partner Jason Rubin at this age in 1982 and, united by their fascination with programming on the Apple II+, the two learned how to make games through experimentation and collaboration. Naughty Dog is today renowned for its showstopping blend of cinematic storytelling with sharp gameplay mechanics, and the dizzying ambition of its two young co-founders led to those core principles.

"The first game I ever programmed was a crude RPG called *VE2* that I wrote first on my school Heathkit and then on my Apple II+," explains Andy. "It had you wander around a fantasy world and randomly encounter orcs, kobolds and the like. It wasn't so different than a single-player text *Dark Tower*."

When they met, Jason's games looked superior, yet they frequently crashed; Andy's, on the other hand, were better

programmed, yet lacked a certain visual flair. These complementary skills encapsulated their creative dynamic. "Fundamentally we shared a very similar vision for game making (make it cool!) and brought overlapping but different skills to the table," says Andy. "I was more technical and he was more artistic, but we were both very motivated and energetic. We used to joke years later that it would be difficult for any would-be third partner to keep up, even if only on account of our intensity."

Andy and Jason finished their first commercial Apple II title, *Ski Stud*, when



» The title screen of *Ski Stud* with Jam Software logo. Is it us or does he look a little like Crash Bandicoot?

INSTANT EXPERT

The Simpsons creator Matt Groening was a fan of the early *Crash* games – he said so on the DVD commentary to the episode 'Lisa Gets An 'A'', which aired in 1998, where a *Crash*-like game called *Dash Dingo* forms a central part of the episode's storyline.

The original name for Naughty Dog, JAM, stood for 'Jason and Andy's Magic'.

Three of the *Crash* games rank in the 20 bestselling titles on PSone. The series shipped 30 million units on the console across four games.

Crash Bash is the only PSone *Crash* title that Naughty Dog didn't work on, being released after the studio moved on from the franchise. It was a shoddy vision of things to come for the character...

Andy and Jason sold their first published game, *Ski Stud*, out of bags around Washington DC.

The duo spent \$10,000 on renting floor space at E3 to market *Way Of The Warrior*. It paid off, as multiple publishers expressed an interest.

they were both 15 (they'd completed another unpublished title, *Math Jam*, a year before). The duo struck a publishing deal with Baudville worth \$250 for *Ski Stud* – renamed *Ski Stud* for political correctness' sake. Their chosen moniker at the time was JAM Software, which they kept until 1989.

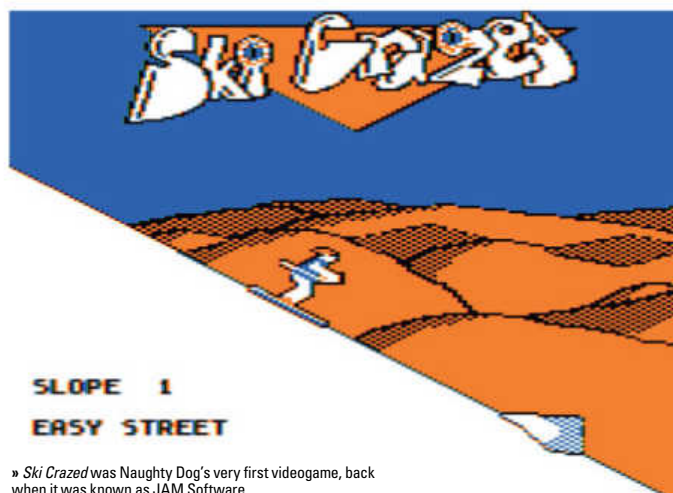
Greater success followed with adventure title *Dream Zone* on the Amiga, Atari ST and Apple II, which sold 10,000 copies and marked their final game to be published by Baudville. "The guys at Baudville were very nice and supportive," Andy explains. "But the company had poor distribution, minor league resources, and a laid-back approach. There was a lot of 'woah, duuuude.' Jason and I were far too ambitious to stick around in that environment."

While selling well, *Dream Zone* was still short of a smash for the pair. "Big hit isn't the word I would use, but it was much more 'real' and substantial than *Ski Stud*. Signing with EA (right after *Dream Zone*) was a big confidence boost and we had to really take things up a notch (although there were many, many more notches until *Crash Bandicoot*!)."



“Sega had Sonic and Nintendo Mario, but Sony? We hoped to jump into that slot”

ANDY GAVIN ON CRASH BANDICOOT BECOMING A MASCOT



» *Ski Ganza* was Naughty Dog's very first videogame, back when it was known as JAM Software.

Remarkably, cold-calling an EA hotline led to their next gig, *Keef The Thief*, again for the Amiga and Apple II. “We just cold-called EA after *Dream Zone*. They asked for our games. We Fedexed them. They called back and offered us a deal! EA in those days was a lot of fun. Occasionally it was a hair bureaucratic, but Trip Hawkins was a very charismatic leader and an extremely fair guy. The whole company had an open and welcoming California feel.”

EA was pleased with the success of *Keef The Thief*, landing the duo a deal for it to publish *Rings Of Power* on the Mega Drive. At this point, however, Andy and Jason were living in different parts of the country as they attended college, so it took three difficult years to get *Rings Of Power* to market. “A big problem with *Rings* was that it was designed as a PC RPG with an odd graphical gimmick (the three-quarter perspective) and then migrated to the Genesis. Really, we should have redone the graphics at that point as a tile-based scrolling world (like *Phantasy Star*). Plus, the sheer scope of the project and the lacklustre treatment from marketing left us a little

burnt.” EA chose not to reprint *Rings Of Power*, which disappointed the pair, leading to a brief hiatus for the nascent studio.

Yet it was Trip Hawkins and the promise of the 3DO that reignited their interest. Trip approached the pair, who were given free dev kits, which led to the creation of their self-funded beat-'em-up *Way Of The Warrior*. “We changed our whole philosophy with *Way*. Instead of doing the game we most wanted to make, we looked for an intersection between cool, manageable and popular. Fighting games were really hot in 1992-4 and when we started, no one seemed to be doing them on the 3DO. It seemed a perfect match.

“*Way* was a blast to develop. Jason and I lived together in this shitty apartment and worked on it 18 hours a day – but we had a lot of fun. The campy nature of both the kung fu genre and our take on it made the whole thing hilarious. I think that shows in the finished product.”

This change in development philosophy governed the success of what followed for the studio. Universal Interactive published *Way Of The Warrior*, and the duo were

► then signed up by Universal in 1994 to produce games on its LA lot, under the guidance of Mark Cerny. “The Universal relationship was a complicated but critical step in our evolution,” Andy says. “In 1994-5 they really brought a lot to the table, particularly in the personification of Mark Cerny and in making a minimalist and relatively supportive environment. We learned how to scale to more than two developers and how to take every element of the production seriously.”

On their extended car journey to Los Angeles, Jason and Andy conceived the idea of a 3D character-driven action game, informally named ‘Sonic’s ass’, where the player would view the protagonist from behind while manoeuvring through the environment. This was the basis for *Crash Bandicoot*’s creation. We ask Andy if he felt he and Jason had generated an idea that was ahead of its time. “Actually, yes. Even as an idea, it seemed to offer a solution to the ‘how to do platforming in 3D’ dilemma. In practice, there were a lot of details to work out.” As relayed on Andy’s website, Naughty Dog was worried about the player’s depth perception, the potential for dizziness and camera quality. No precedent had really been set, here – yet Universal was as keen on the ‘Sonic’s ass’ idea as Andy and Jason themselves. Plus, *Mario 64* didn’t exist yet, either.

► *Rings Of Power* was a complex PC-style game brought to Sega’s 16-bit Mega Drive.



The choice of format was easy. In a hardware market burdened by big failures and fragmented efforts from Sega, Sony offered a fresher start with the PlayStation. “It was really the best choice. The hardware was better. Sony seemed organised and perhaps most importantly, didn’t have a pre-existing ‘mascot’ character. Sega had Sonic and Nintendo Mario, but Sony? We hoped to jump into that slot.”

Jason and Andy toyed with the idea of a character called Willie The Wombat before settling on a bandicoot. A Warner Bros animation influence hung over the art direction and style of *Crash Bandicoot*, and Mark Cerny employed talented cartoonist Charles Zembillas to do character designs for *Crash*’s cast (Zembillas also created Spyro The Dragon for Insomniac, based on the Universal lot with Naughty Dog).

Released just three months after *Super Mario 64* in 1996, *Crash Bandicoot* was a sales smash. “Fundamentally, *Crash* offered a number of things,” Andy says, when we ask about the key to its massive success. “First of all, the character and his world are great, and totally approachable. You can understand him at a glance, and he is highly inclusive. His combination of goofy positivity is very endearing. The world was also very appealing and consistently designed. Second, the gameplay is very fast and furious – if a little hard in *Crash 1*.



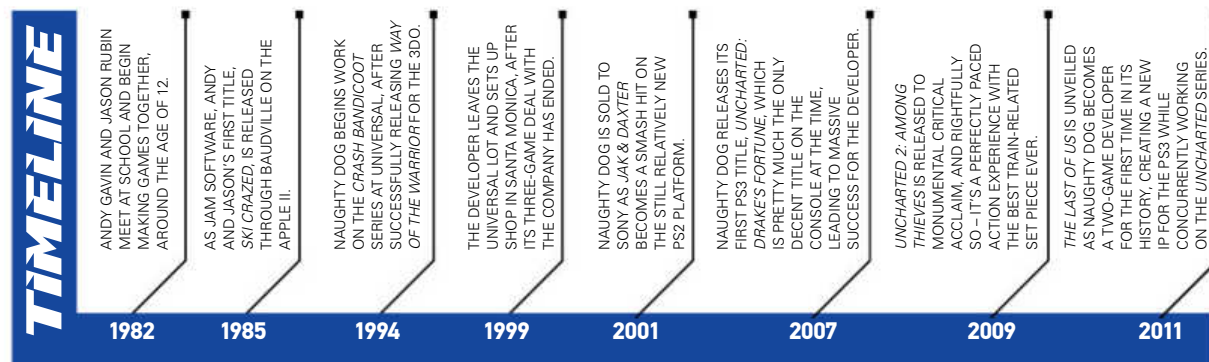
► In many ways, *Crash Bandicoot* encapsulated the cooler, alternative tone set by PlayStation when it arrived on the market.

“I wouldn’t call it a new engine, but we basically stripped out and rewrote every major system in the engine one by one”

ANDY GAVIN ON MAKING CRASH BANDICOOT 2

It has a measured pace and rewards perseverance. When you get on a roll, it’s pretty damn satisfying.”

Crash Bandicoot may have conceptually stemmed from the phrase ‘Sonic’s ass’, but Naughty Dog’s character became an icon in his own right just as the blue hedgehog’s best days were ending. While *Mario 64* became a milestone of action adventure games set in a 3D space, *Crash* offered an edgier counterpoint, encapsulating the cooler attitude that made the original PlayStation such a massive cultural event. There was something fresher in *Crash* and, like the Warner characters it was inspired by, you got the sense that its creators were speaking as much to adults as they were to kids. Naughty Dog had signed a three-game deal with Universal in





» Andy Gavin poses with one of his most famous creations, Crash Bandicoot.



» *Crash Team Racing* was a sharp alternative to *Mario Kart* on PlayStation, with a nicely structured adventure mode.

1994, covering the next two releases: *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* in 1997 and *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* in 1998.

Another unusual part of *Crash Bandicoot*'s commercial performance was its extraordinary sales in Japan, which were unusual for a Western-developed title. It truly was an international phenomenon – and the duo's confidence paid off. "We hoped for it, but I was still surprised it actually happened," Andy reflects on the success. "Enormously pleased though."

"We each had to step into the role of mentoring and advising an ever growing crew of developers," Andy explains about how his and Jason's roles changed as the studio expanded. "Fortunately, we hired really talented people so we also learned a lot from them, but we had to do a lot more producing and managing. On a technical level, Dave and I (the *Crash 1* programmers) combined some of our MIT engineering rigour with game practicality to do some really ambitious engineering on the level with other great (even non-game) software companies. This gave our games a leg up that, when combined with great design and awesome graphics, made them really stand out. A one-two-three punch."

The subsequent titles performed equally well thanks to this combination of qualities and allowed the Naughty Dog team to push the PlayStation hardware's visual capabilities further. "I wouldn't call it a new engine, but

we basically stripped out and rewrote every major system in the engine one by one," explains Andy, when we ask him to discuss *Crash*'s first sequel. "*Crash 2* shares the same architecture, but everything was overhauled and improved!"

The series won more plaudits over the next two instalments, with critics praising the more varied level design, increased fidelity of the animation and the ambition that demonstrated healthy signs of Naughty Dog's maturity as a studio. "*Crash 3* wasn't so much a technical risk like *Crash 2*, it was just a death sprint. We did the whole game in nine months and built *so much* content. The engine itself got a few upgrades, particularly the tech for various kinds of water and the flying, but mostly it was levels, levels, levels and more levels!"

By this point, Sony was funding and publishing the *Crash* titles, and the two co-founders questioned the worth of Universal Interactive's input. As a result of choosing not to renew the latter's publishing deal, Naughty Dog apparently had to make *Crash 3* in the corridors at Universal. For its final *Crash* title, the high-quality karting spin-off *Crash Team Racing*, Sony negotiated the rights to use the licence since Naughty Dog was no longer on brilliant terms with its previous publisher.

"Mark Cerny was there the entire time we worked with them and we had a great relationship with him," recalls Andy. ▶



» *Crash Bandicoot 2* started to have some real fun with the variety in level design.



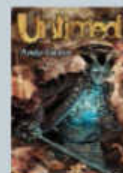
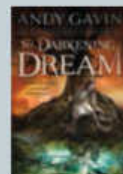
» A call to the Electronic Arts hotline led to *Keef the Thief*. *Rings of Power* eventually followed.

FROM THE ARCHIVES: NAUGHTY DOG

□ WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Andy Gavin

Andy co-founded the company Flektor with Jason Rubin after leaving Naughty Dog, creating a web program that allowed for easy online content mash-ups that quickly grew after its 2007 launch. The duo sold it to Fox in 2009 for north of \$20 million, just as the latter was attempting to move into social media territory with MySpace. Andy and Jason left soon after. Since then, Andy has written two paranormal fantasy novels, *Untimed* and *The Darkening Dream*, and blogs extensively about a variety of topics at www.all-things-andy-gavin.com, where he often answers questions about the series he's worked on. He also does some rather entertaining write-ups of episodes of *Game Of Thrones* and documents his memories of working at Naughty Dog, with contributions from co-founder Jason Rubin.



Jason Rubin



Working on Flektor with Andy, Jason Rubin also ventured into comic book writing, creating *The Iron Saint* and *Mysterious Ways* through his company MORGANrose, published by Aspen Comics and Top Cow respectively. He also co-owned a mobile games studio with Andy known as Monkey Gods, which Jason described as an 'experiment'. Jason also recently became president of THQ, which, despite his best efforts to save the company, went bankrupt and had its assets sold off earlier this year. His main focus as president was focusing on stronger core titles, and it seemed like the company wasn't too far off a turnaround, though a few poor releases prior to his leadership left THQ with a lot of financial shortcomings. Anecdotally, we've heard positive things about Jason's leadership at the now-defunct publisher.

» *Way Of The Warrior* had great visuals, enjoyable combat and plenty of gore. Thanks to John Szczepaniak for the images.



» *Jak And Daxter* eliminated loading times from its gigantic overworld, which few other PS2 games could match.



» The *Uncharted* series has been a massive success for both Sony and Naughty Dog. We're still hoping for a fourth PS3 adventure.



» The *Jak And Daxter* series was recently rereleased on Sony's PlayStation 3 in a new HD collection. It's a pretty solid compilation.



» *Jak II: Renegade* made noticeable moves towards modern trends in 2003 when it took the series into *GTA*'s sandbox territory.

► “Our relationship with the 1997-1999 management was actually cordial, but we didn’t always think they brought a lot to the table. Around the time we were separating, the whole management changed over there again (Jim Wilson came in) and we never really got to know that crew. The company did have a pretty flawed corporate culture, one that didn’t always encourage fair play. They stopped paying us... we had to sue them (we eventually won everything).”

After Universal, Naughty Dog set up shop in Santa Monica, and by this point its relationship with Sony was exceptionally strong. Andy says that the developer’s choice of hardware was more down to opportunity than any emotional ties – yet in 2000, after beginning work on their first non-*Crash* title in six years, Andy and Jason sold Naughty Dog to Sony, in a move motivated by the console maker’s desire to own its next big intellectual property.

“We had a great relationship with Sony from 1996 on,” Andy says. “By 2000 when we were discussing the merger, we were not only exclusive in practice but chummy with all levels of the company, from junior producers and QA managers to Kaz Hirai... It is/was a great company, with bright motivated people, a lot of energy, a determination to do things well, and an ethos of fairness and honesty. Companies are like people, and any that has a lot of these things going for it is a rarity.”

Jason was confident that Naughty Dog could have functioned independently, but being absorbed by Sony allowed the team to focus on making games. The studio was one of the first to obtain a PS2 dev kit, though working with the new hardware didn’t come easy, according to Andy. “The



» *Jak And Daxter* soon turned into a trilogy for PlayStation 2 owners.

PS2 had a very steep learning curve. It was a great machine, but to milk all the power out of it you had to migrate a lot of code onto the vector units. It was vastly more complicated than the PSone. Naughty Dog was one of the few teams that thrived in those early PS2 days because the quality of our programmers and technical artists was so high. Lesser tech guys got dusted.”

The team’s new title, 2001’s *Jak And Daxter*, marked an ambitious turn from the linear platforming of *Crash*. A Nintendo-inspired platform/adventure, it would feature a seamless open world with no loading screens, which caused numerous

headaches for Andy and his team. “Oh, God. The seamless loading was hard. We had been heading in this direction with *Crash*, which featured a very sophisticated streaming system and extremely short load times (3-4 seconds!), but with *Jak And Daxter* we had this early mandate to eliminate loading entirely. It was hard, but very cool in a subtle way. Very few games do it even now.”

The Nintendo pastiche was deliberate, too. “There was a lot of *Mario 64* / *Banjo* influence in *Jak 1*, as they were the most modern (and best) examples of platforming during the 1999-2000 period when *Jak* was under design.”

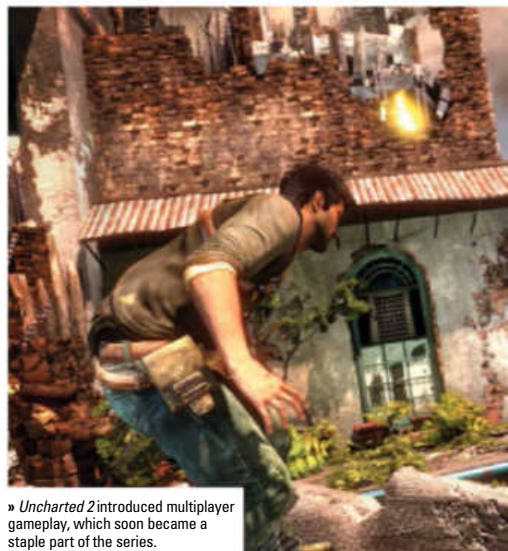
Jak was another huge hit on PS2, if not quite as commercially gargantuan as *Crash*, and once again gave the PlayStation brand

“Focus on characters, trifecta of art, gameplay and technology, and massive polish and attention to detail”

ANDY GAVIN ON NAUGHTY DOG’S DESIGN PHILOSOPHIES

□ WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CRASH BANDICOOT?

Owned by Activision now after it merged with Vivendi several years ago, Crash Bandicoot is MIA while his former stablemate Spyro the Dragon is part of the plastic-shifting phenomenon that is *Skylanders*. “He isn’t really anywhere, which is sad, as Crash is a great character,” reflects Andy on Crash’s current status. That special quality that defined Naughty Dog’s *Crash* titles was lost in the first multiplatform release, *The Wrath of Cortex*, in 2001, which mostly rehashed the ideas of previous *Crash* titles. It was published during the same holiday period as *Jak And Daxter*, and naturally it didn’t compare too well. From there, the *Crash* series got progressively worse, though the last instalment, *Crash Of The Titans*, wasn’t completely awful. The magic’s just been lost a little bit from the series – there’s never been a drive to innovate or push the 3D platforming genre forward with *Crash* outside of Naughty Dog’s hands, which defined the original games’ success.



» *Uncharted 2* introduced multiplayer gameplay, which soon became a staple part of the series.

DEFINING GAMES



Way Of The Warrior

As a viable *Mortal Kombat* alternative on the struggling 3DO, *Way Of The Warrior* was arguably the best known of Naughty Dog's pre-*Crash* titles, with a sense of irony that its contemporaries lacked. This marked the start of the studio's relationship with Universal, which turned out to be extremely fruitful. *Way Of The Warrior* is notable for its gory visuals, diverse characters (portrayed by friends and relatives of the staff) and impressive combo attacks. It features a particularly aggressive soundtrack too, with many of the tracks coming from White Zombie's album *Le Sexorcisto: Devil Music, Vol 1*.



Crash Bandicoot

Arriving on a console without a mascot, *Crash Bandicoot* posited its own solution for the 3D platformer genre that contrasted strongly with Nintendo's ideas in *Mario 64* – Crash was an icon with the complete package from the start, with strong character designs and instantly gratifying platforming mechanics in a game packed with smart level design. *Crash Bandicoot* proved to be a watershed moment for Naughty Dog and, as *Sonic* had done with Sega's Mega Drive before it, helped convince gamers that Sony's new cool console was the machine to own. A superb evolution of the platform genre that everyone needs to play.



Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy

Bearing some resemblance to the *Crash* series in its feel, *Jak And Daxter* exchanged linear levels for a gigantic environment filled with 101 various challenges. *Banjo Kazooie*, *Zelda* and *Mario 64* all inspired its ambitious design, which illustrated Naughty Dog's ability to create a large, cohesive world to rival Nintendo's own properties. *Jak's* persistent game world and near seamless loading times showed off Naughty Dog's technical prowess, while the clever pairing of the silent Jak and motormouth Daxter was a testament to the studio's keen eye for strong characterisation.



Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

While *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* was a highly enjoyable PS3 debut, its ambitious sequel bettered it in every way. It built on the original game's *Indiana Jones* pastiche, setting players up with a gauntlet of ever-escalating set pieces and a rip-roaring tale, marking a new high in pacing for third-person action-adventure games. It's a highly engaging cinematic romp, and still looks incredibly cutting edge. It's also notable for introducing for bringing a slick multiplayer offering to the popular series. While *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* featured more outlandish setpieces, the gameplay wasn't as good.



» *The Last Of Us* has been a huge success for Naughty Dog. A greatly enhanced version was recently released for the PlayStation 4.

» *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* is due out in 2016 and looks set to ramp up the action to exciting new levels.



a mascot that it needed. The series moved into an open-world paradigm with 2003's *Jak II: Renegade*, which was clearly a product of its time in a post-GTA III world. "We wanted to show that we could go open world with the best of them!"

By the time the vehicle-centric *Jak 3's* release came around in 2004, the co-founders' contracts were up, and Andy and Jason felt confident about leaving Naughty Dog in the hands of its veteran staff, headed up by Evan Wells and Christophe Balestra; their departure was as much about allowing these new leaders to develop as the desire to have a bit of time off for other projects. "Not only has Naughty Dog survived for 8.5 years since we left, but it has thrived and grown," Andy says. "Evan, Christophe and the whole team over there continue to show their enormous talent and dedication. The games are new, cutting edge and yet still very much Naughty Dog games. They draw

from the same basic philosophical strategy we developed in the *Crash* era: focus on characters, trifection of art, gameplay, and technology, and massive polish and attention to detail."

The *Uncharted* series does indeed embody those ideals and, particularly with its barnstorming second instalment released in 2009, shows how Naughty Dog's direction has weathered time effectively and allowed it to progress effectively as a studio. *The Last Of Us* is its latest release, a post-apocalyptic thriller that touches upon darker subject matter than we're used to seeing in the developer's releases, which again seems like a natural part of its evolution.

What's reassuring about Naughty Dog's enduring reputation, then, is that those principles outlined by Andy and Jason, back when they made *Way Of The Warrior*, have survived until today – Naughty Dog creates big, fun games with a credible mass appeal, a balance that few developers can equal

with any great conviction. Yet it stemmed from two confident friends teaching each other how to make games, and a mutual loyalty leading to unexpected levels of hard-earned success.

"They feature big integrated worlds, gameplay-first storytelling and all the above stuff," says Andy, discussing what defines a modern Naughty Dog game. "That's what makes them Naughty Dog games. Starting with *Jak 1* and moving into *Jak 2*, we really focused on trying to make the best 'story you play' possible. *Uncharted 2* and *3* take this to whole new levels. The 2004-2013 steps have been just as challenging as the 1994-2004 steps. Same dance, different moves."

Naughty Dog's *The Last Of Us* was recently released on PS4. Andy Gavin is the author of *The Darkening Dream* and *Untimed*. Find out more at the-darkening-dream.com and untimed-novel.com.

Castlevania

Symphony of the Night



Many 3D-obsessed gamers thought Konami was mad when it decided to make a 2D Castlevania for Sony's powerful PlayStation. The Japanese developer had the last laugh, thanks to its genre-busting game. Damien McFerran discovers how it all happened...

THE MAKING OF CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT



» The bat transformation allows Alucard to enter previously inaccessible areas.



» The bells! The bells!

initially denied access to every portion of Vlad's sprawling, demonic fortress from the outset, but thanks to a finely tuned drip feed of abilities – ranging from the humble double-jump to unique shape-shifting enchantments – they would gradually gain entry to more sections of the ageing citadel as progression was made. For example, at various points in the castle the way forward would be barred by iron grilles. To continue, the player had to collect a relic that would permit them to alter their appearance to that of a fine mist, therefore allowing them to pass effortlessly through the obstacle. Another area – a tunnel covered in deadly spikes – could only be traversed when in 'bat' form. These puzzles were not particularly demanding but they resulted in a game that rewarded exploration and proved to be a supremely involving and enjoyable experience, while thankfully retaining the classic hack-and-slash action that aficionados of the series held so dear.



» This looks a strange place for candlesticks if you ask us.

IN THE KNOW



» PUBLISHER: KONAMI

» DEVELOPER: KONAMI

» RELEASED: 1997

» PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PSP, XBLA

» GENRE: ADVENTURE



Regular readers of *Retro Gamer* may have noticed that we harbour something of a soft spot for Konami's splendid gothic adventure *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. We gleefully leap on any excuse to mention it and will happily print screenshots at the slightest provocation, only Capcom's *Strider* features more prominently. In our defence, the blood-sucking platform romp remains one of the most truly essential pieces of 32-bit software and has justifiably attained near-legendary status within the already classic-filled *Castlevania* canon. Even now, nearly twenty years after its debut, it remains not only the best game in the series, but one of the finest Metroidvanias to ever be created. With that in mind, we felt it was the perfect opportunity to speak with Koji 'IGA' Igarashi (who was series producer at the time) about the development of what many deem to be the crowning glory of a highly esteemed franchise.

IGA was responsible for the welfare of *Castlevania* lineage and has recently overseen the production of two excellent Nintendo DS episodes in the shape of *Dawn Of Sorrow* and *Portrait Of Ruin*. He also oversaw the less successful *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair*. He joined Konami in the early-Nineties and worked on a variety of titles before becoming part of the *Castlevania* team prior to the development of *Symphony*

Of The Night. The game represented a significant turning point for the series. With the exception of the free-roaming *Simon's Quest* on the NES, over a decade's worth of instalments had displayed an unwavering commitment to the fairly straightforward 'platform action' template, which saw the player utilising the legendary 'Vampire Killer' whip to send all manner of nocturnal beasts packing. Contrary to popular belief, IGA was not employed as primary director on the project – that honour fell to Toru Hagihara, who was also responsible for the excellent *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* on NEC's PC Engine Super CD-ROM system (which incidentally is the direct prequel to *Symphony Of The Night*). However, IGA served as assistant director as well as participating in the writing of the scenario and general programming, so it could be argued that he had the most telling influence over proceedings.

It was apparent from the outset that Konami wished to steer the franchise in a fresh, new direction. "Action games could be cleared in a short time, but I wished to create a game that could be enjoyed for a much longer period," explains IGA. Taking inspiration from Nintendo's SNES classic *Super Metroid*, the team decided to shy away from the stage-by-stage concept of previous titles and cultivate a totally open, free-roaming castle for the player to explore. Hardy adventurers were

"ACTION GAMES COULD BE CLEARED IN A SHORT TIME, BUT I WISHED TO CREATE A GAME THAT COULD BE ENJOYED FOR A MUCH LONGER PERIOD" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**DRACULA X:
RONDO OF BLOOD** (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: (PC ENGINE CD-ROM)
YEAR: 1993

METAL GEAR SOLID
SYSTEMS: (PSX)
YEAR: 1998

NANO BREAKER
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2005



» The epic final encounter with Big Daddy Dracula.

Another major innovation was the introduction of role-playing mechanics. This particular evolution was borne out of the common perception that the series was something of a tough nut in terms of challenge, as IGA explains: "I wanted to change the impression that *Castlevania* was this difficult-to-access action game. When we decided to adopt RPG elements, we agreed that users should receive something good when beating enemies. So I thought of adding Experience Points to the game." For the first time in the series, players could enhance their chances of victory by levelling up and augmenting their character with a vast array of powerful weapons, armour and spells. The concept of earning experience for every enemy successfully slain also prevented the inevitable back-tracking from becoming too arduous, and in many

ways made the game more accessible for less skilled gamers. "I thought that even the users who were not good at playing this type of action game would be able to clear *Symphony Of The Night* if I adopted this particular system," continues IGA. Some fans would later complain that the developer was slightly too successful in this regard and actually made the game too easy, and when compared to the stubborn, almost sadistic challenge represented by previous titles (NES *Castlevania*, we're looking at you), they had a point. Regardless of this, *Symphony* still possessed many hours of playtime within the dank, crumbling walls of Dracula's stronghold. The map screen was massive to begin with, but if certain parameters were met the player could teleport to a second castle – an inverted, upside down version of the first – and continue the



» Flying crucifixes can take your eye out, lad.

valiant quest. This effectively doubled the size of the game and the 'proper' ending – one of several – could only be accessed when this second castle was beaten. The introduction of a multitude of useful items, including healing potions, food and one-shot weaponry imbued *Symphony* with a depth unlike anything else experienced in such a title. The urge to collect every trinket, explore the attack possibilities of every weapon, and cover every inch of the evil stronghold proved irresistible for many.

Not content with shaking things up gameplay wise, IGA also turned a few heads when it came to selecting the lead character for the game. Traditionally, the vampire-hunting Belmont clan took centre stage in *Castlevania* titles but *Symphony* saw the player controlling the half-vampire, half-human offspring of Dracula himself, Alucard. "I decided to choose a character that had a special link to the previous *Castlevania* titles," comments IGA. Alucard (Dracula spelt backwards) had appeared as a secondary character in the brilliant NES game *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* – which IGA cites as his favourite entry in the entire series – where he fought alongside



» Michiru Yamane and Koji 'IGA' Igarashi.

"THE WORLD OF THE VAMPIRE THAT I HAVE IN MY MIND IS BEAUTIFUL AND FLEETING WITH BLOOD AND DARKNESS. THE SERIES HAD A VISUAL IMAGE FEATURING HOSTILITY" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI



» The map screen takes inspiration from *Super Metroid*.



» Left: The abysmal American cover artwork. Middle: Ayami Kojima's striking artwork for the Japanese release. Right: The Euro release thankfully retained Kojima's stunning work, but sold poorly.

THE MAKING OF CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT



» Who's the man? Shaft! Ahem.

the heroic Trevor Belmont to prevent his patriarch's murderous revival. After sealing this important victory he made the decision to place himself in indefinite hibernation to prevent his cursed bloodline from causing humanity any further mischief. Resurrecting the 'Tragic Prince' for *Symphony* proved an inspired move, but IGA reveals that, at the time, he was concerned that such a sweeping change would anger the fans. "Personally, I liked Alucard very much and it was totally fine with me, but I presumed that those who had been fans for a long time would be angry with our decision since it was the first time the series ever had a non-whip-using character as a hero." In hindsight, he needn't have worried – the fans took to the new lead like a duck to water. "The Japanese title was *Akumajo Dracula X*. I used 'X' to show that it would be apart from the main stream of the series, but surprisingly, it has now become the mainstream," he comments with a degree of satisfaction. Alucard is now regarded as one of the most popular characters in the *Castlevania* universe and IGA is well aware of the contribution he made to the ultimate triumph of *Symphony*. "Alucard was just a really cool hero, and that is why I think *Symphony Of The Night* has been received so favourably by the fans." Nevertheless, in order to appease those few stubborn traditionalists that might have been offended by a vampire taking centre stage, IGA thoughtfully included the option to play as Richter Belmont, albeit as an unlockable extra.

Regardless of the changes being made elsewhere, one aspect of the game retained the brilliance of former titles:

the epic boss encounters. In keeping with the grand vision IGA and his team strived to attain, *Symphony* was packed to bursting point with some of the most creative and visually stunning 2D bosses ever witnessed. Many of these fiendish creations were able to trace their roots right back to the NES instalments of the series – the towering Galamoth previously appeared in the disarmingly cute *Castlevania* spin-off *Kid Dracula*, and hardcore fans should have no trouble remembering which other games Medusa, Werewolf and Frankenstein's Monster have cropped up in before. "My favourite is definitely Beelzebub," replies IGA when pressed about which boss he rates highest. Indeed, this particular enemy proved to be one of the most memorable in the entire game, taking the form of a gigantic, rotting corpse suspended on rusty meat hooks. Victory could only be gained by hacking away at his putrid, decomposing limbs while avoiding the unwelcome attention of several massive mutated flies. When you consider the limited RAM of Sony's 32-bit console and the poor reputation it had for hosting 2D titles, it makes IGA's achievements all the more impressive.

The *Castlevania* franchise has always had a reputation for high-quality musical accompaniment and *Symphony* is no exception. Indeed, many consider Michiru Yamane's work to be the finest ever heard in the series. With this in mind, did IGA ever feel that the expectation of aural excellence imposed limitations on his development? "The music direction has never led the creation of the game," he states. "I have always asked Michiru to compose music in accordance with the actual game and never the other way around. She always co-ordinated with the development team and composed music from the image of the stages." When asked which tune was his favourite, IGA playfully admits that he's slightly biased: "My favourite is *Castle Dracula* which starts to play when Alucard enters the castle for the very first time. I was impressed with the way the music starts to play once Alucard enters the dark castle, and then suddenly the castle gets bright and zombies start to appear. It might be

because that particular part of the game was programmed by myself." Yamane's soundtrack was a fusion of rock, jazz and classical styles that appeared hopelessly mismatched on paper but worked surprisingly well in practice. Standout tracks included *Strange Bloodlines*, which played over Richter's battle with Dracula in the prelude; *Wood Carving Partita*, a string-based composition that wouldn't have sounded out of place in a Hollywood period piece; and *Requiem For The Gods*, a largely vocal track which accompanied the Church section of the castle. The musical package was rounded off rather neatly by Rika Muranaka's heart-wrenching *I am the Wind*, which plays over the end credits. It was sung by American Cynthia Harrell, who also performed vocal duties on the infamously camp title theme of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. Unsurprisingly, the soundtrack CD remains popular with fans a decade after it was published.

The introduction of Ayami Kojima's sumptuous artwork was the icing on an already tantalisingly gorgeous cake. Again, a desire to establish a new vision for the series was the main reason behind her involvement as IGA explains: "The world of the vampire that I have in my mind is beautiful and fleeting with blood and darkness. The series had a visual image featuring hostility, but I tried to change the image since the game concept itself

FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES

In 2007, Konami released *Symphony Of The Night* on XBLA. In the same year it produced an updated version of the acclaimed PC Engine instalment *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* – this will be the first time the game has been officially published outside Japan. Similar to Capcom's PSP game *Extreme Ghosts 'N' Ghosts*, the game uses a brand new 2.5D graphic engine, updated character designs from Ayami Kojima and an all-new soundtrack. Some would argue that the best thing regarding this momentous release was the announcement that the original versions of both *Rondo* and *Symphony* will feature as unlockable extras, which means fans could play *Symphony* on the move for the first time ever. *Symphony Of The Night* was also made available on Sony's PSN service, meaning PS3 owners could also enjoy Konami's groundbreaking adventure game.





» Richter tackles a giant Vlad in the gripping prologue.

was going to change," he continues. Kojima's mature and astonishingly detailed art elevated the game to a whole new level of brilliance, and for once the series was granted a cohesive image that has endured ever since. Her combination of Japanese sensibility with classical painting methods resulted in some of the most breathtakingly stunning artwork ever attributed to a videogame release and it's testament to her truly wonderful talent that when a new *Castlevania* title is announced you can bet that one of the first questions to flash across internet forums worldwide is 'Has Kojima done the artwork?' Just

check out our front cover if you need further proof of her incredible skill.

With this amalgamation of fantastic gameplay, stupefying depth, gorgeous design and a downright brilliant musical score, it's unsurprising that *Symphony* went on to sell thousands in Japan where it was released as *Akumajo Dracula X: Gekka no Yasoukyoku* (*Demon Castle Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*). Huge sales and heaps of critical acclaim were also prevalent when the game debuted in the US but it perplexingly failed to replicate this success in Europe. Reports vary but it is believed that the initial print

run for the PAL version was around the 15,000 mark and many of these copies had to be heavily discounted by disappointed stores before they eventually sold. It's been argued that lukewarm reviews in the UK press – several magazines dismissed it as a 16-bit game on 32-bit hardware – contributed to the dour performance at retail, but whatever the cause, Konami knew it had a turkey on its hands and consequently didn't produce any more PAL copies. Meanwhile, in Japan and the US the game was reprinted several times in order to satisfy demand and was eventually granted best-seller status in both territories. The low number of PAL units, coupled with the fact that most came with highly desirable limited-edition items (see Bonus Stage) has recently caused prices to soar – it's not unusual for mint and complete Euro editions to fetch three figures on eBay, while the NTSC versions struggle to scrape £10.

A year after the PlayStation release, *Symphony* was ported to Sega Saturn by Konami's Nagoya studio (not the original team, it should be noted). On paper this promised to be the definitive *Symphony* – the raw 2D clout of Sega's 32-bit machine combined with Konami's boast that it intended to add a raft of exciting features (such as an additional playable character in the form of Maria Renard, two brand new castle areas and a smattering of additional items) resulted in fans being whipped into a frenzy of anticipation. Unfortunately, the eventual release was something of a disappointment. The gorgeous transparency and lighting effects so abundant in the PlayStation original had been replaced by unsightly cross-hatch textures (Saturn infamously struggled with these kinds of effects) and the game was afflicted with bouts of crippling slowdown when the on-screen action became too hectic. The much-hyped new levels were also distinctly underwhelming and were populated by some seriously daft new enemy sprites – the deranged horticulturalist in the Underground Garden instantly springs to mind – and consequently the Saturn port remains a purchase only hardcore fans should seriously consider making. Sega's 32-bit machine had all but given up the ghost in the West by the time the conversion was released in 1998 and as a result it never made it officially outside of Japan (although a Western release was mentioned several times in Sega's own promotional material). This has elevated prices to levels that almost rival that of the PAL PlayStation version.

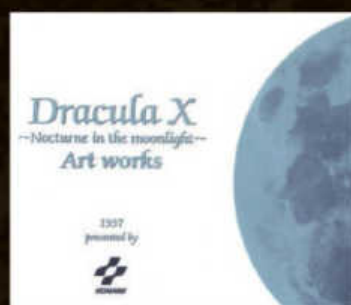
Interestingly, around the same time another conversion was announced for Tiger's ill-fated Game.com handheld platform. Envisaged as a competitor to Nintendo's all-conquering Game Boy, the Game.com boasted rudimentary



» The Sega Saturn version featured some rather silly enemies.



» If dying wasn't enough, these poor skeletons have now been relegated to skull-bearing status.



BONUS STAGE

Two bonus items were produced by Konami and bundled with *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* in varying quantities across the three main territories. The first was a small book, which featured a black-and-white illustrated prelude to the game and some lovely full-colour character artwork courtesy of Ayami Kojima. Initially intended solely for the Japanese market (it reads from right to left, as is Japanese custom, and is entitled '*Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*') the book was eventually carried across to the American and PAL markets too. The second item is a CD, which contains a selection of tracks from various titles in the *Castlevania* series. Both items are highly sought after by fans and the art book alone has been known to fetch £50 on eBay. Amazingly, these items were bundled with the PAL version from launch but were only available to those who pre-ordered in NTSC territories.

"I WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL CONVERSION, BUT I THINK IT WAS HARD SINCE I GAVE SO MANY TOUGH REQUESTS" HOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI



» Screens from the abandoned port for Tiger's ill-advised Game.com console.

» An advert for the cancelled Game.com conversion.

touch-screen technology and basic online functions, but neither of these potentially groundbreaking features were utilised effectively and a flood of lacklustre software resulted in the monochrome console flopping disastrously at retail. Tiger threw in the towel and development on the *Symphony Of The Night* port (which was being handled in-house by Tiger itself) was brought to an abrupt halt. Beyond a handful of screenshots it's not known exactly how far they got – the official line is that it was half finished, but some sceptics have gone as far as to speculate that the screens were simply mock-ups created in order to generate badly needed public interest in the doomed portable. No playable code has appeared in the intervening years so it's unlikely that it was anywhere near completion and the promise of a portable *Symphony* has only recently been fulfilled (see *Fangs For The Memories*).

Nearly two decades have passed since the world laid eyes on this astounding piece of electronic entertainment, yet interest is still as strong as ever with

many devotees adamant that *Symphony* represents the pinnacle of the entire *Castlevania* franchise – no mean feat when you consider the gloriously high benchmark set by past titles like *Super Castlevania IV* and *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* and more recent entries such as the Hideo Kojima produced *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*. "I am really proud that it has been evaluated as such," comments IGA with a completely justified sense of pride. However, the man who was once responsible for the future of one of Konami's most valuable franchises steadfastly refuses to rest on his laurels: "I cannot say it was the best since I think I need to always make every endeavour to create better games for everyone to enjoy."

As previously mentioned, the XBLA release of *Symphony* was released in 2007. Programming duties were carried out by emulation expert Digital Eclipse which has previously impressed with several highly accurate and well-received retro compilations. Although IGA is not directly involved, he admits that he has been badgering the developer to ensure it gets

superlative results. "I was not involved in the actual conversion, so I don't know much about it, but I think it was hard since I gave so many tough requests to the conversion team when we first handed them the project." There has been talk of various graphical improvements being included and the epic adventure will be the first to break Microsoft's self-imposed 50MB limit for Live Arcade content – an indication of how committed it is to ensuring the port is as faithful as possible. IGA has the utmost confidence in the ability of Digital Eclipse. "I am sure it deserves to be downloaded and played, and hopefully it will reach a brand new audience," he states categorically. Does this brave new method of software distribution intrigue the *Castlevania* producer and does he foresee the possibility of more titles from the series being made available for download? "I am very interested in the online distribution and look forward to it, but that's all I can say for now," he replies enigmatically. One thing is certain – the acclaimed franchise is in very good hands.



AYAMI KOJIMA

Self-taught illustrator Kojima is now so inexorably linked with the *Castlevania* franchise that it's easy to forget that she's only been involved since *Symphony Of The Night*. Kojima started her career by illustrating novel covers, and branched into videogames in 1997 with *Symphony* and the Koei Sega Saturn strategy title *Söldnerschild*. Her contribution to *Symphony* made her something

of legend among *Castlevania* enthusiasts and she went on to create further artwork for *Castlevania Chronicles* (PSOne), *Harmony Of Dissonance/Concerto Of The Midnight Sun* (GBA), *Aria Of Sorrow/Minuet Of Dawn* (GBA), *Lament Of Innocence* (PS2) and *Curse Of Darkness* (PS2/Xbox). Her somewhat unique representation of the male form – highly feminine with lithe bodies and long, flowing locks – has caused consternation among some sectors of *Castlevania* fandom as her work has proven especially appealing to female Shonen-ai (young man love) manga addicts.



» Beelzebub is Iga's favourite boss. After fighting against him, it's easy to see why.



» Alucard stops for a quick breather and a lecture from an irate ghost.



THE DRIFT KING



IT MADE A BIG IMPACT WHEN IT DRIFTED INTO ARCADES IN 1993, BEFORE MAKING AN EVEN BIGGER ONE A YEAR LATER WHEN IT SHOWED OFF THE IMPRESSIVE POWER OF SONY'S PLAYSTATION. RETRO GAMER LOOKS THROUGH A ROSE-TINTED REAR-VIEW TO REMEMBER THE RACING HISTORY OF RIIIIIIIDGE RACER

Arcade gaming and arcade ports saw something of a renaissance in the Nineties thanks to the arrival of popular coin-ops such as *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*. Their close relationship went all the way when hardware and software developers began experimenting with comparable arcade and console technology, causing a significant shift to occur as the coin-op and domestic game markets never looking so comparable. Reigniting creativity and imagination as limitations lifted, a raft of popular polygonal 3D games emerged as two of the biggest forces in arcade gaming at the time, Namco and Sega, came to dominate the 3D arcade market, sparking an epic rivalry between the two companies that spilled into our homes.

That shift of battlefield came to put a considerable strain on the coin-op market as the popularity of home gaming increased, thanks largely to Sony's canny marketing and positioning of the PlayStation. When the expected finally happened, and console games began matching and later eclipsing arcade games in visual fidelity, many no longer saw the value or need to play games on vend. Piers and holiday camps, formerly the reserves for high-fidelity gaming, became like gaming cinemas, showing us 'coming soon' titles that, in a few short months, we would be able to play nigh-on arcade-perfect versions of in the comfort of our living rooms. But as this entertaining battle for arcade supremacy raged on, it was a pretty fantastic time to be a gamer – an exciting period filled with great arcade releases and arcade conversions.

A game emblematic of this technical gap-bridging between the two markets was Namco's *Ridge Racer*. A racing game designed for and debuting in arcades, it found a welcome home on the

PlayStation when it was flawlessly converted as a launch game for the machine in December 1994.

As detailed in our exclusive making of in issue 52, *Ridge Racer* was a concept brought about by brand new PCB technology that Namco had in development, dubbed Namco System 22, that was able to generate striking texture-mapped polygons. Wanting to showcase the technology, Namco turned to the racing genre, this being a common practice by arcade developers – see Sega's *Hang-On*, *Virtua Racing* and *Daytona USA*, and Namco's own *Pole Position*. Incidentally, this is also the reason why *Ridge Racer* has appeared as a launch game for so many machines since.

"In racing games, you can build a vast space structure; create elaborate, realistic visuals; and process a complex, high-speed program," explains Namco's Masanori Kato. "So, I think this is an appropriate subject to first try out the potential of new hardware. Besides, the rules are simple, and no matter the maker of the game, the operations are the same. I think most people don't need to read the manual to understand that they have to race to the finish line. When you get a new piece of hardware, you want to experience something surprising straight away. Isn't it annoying if you have to read all the manual instructions and tips first? For that reason, when you play *Ridge Racer* on a newly acquired piece of hardware, you can enjoy the surprising experience right away, so I think it is the most appropriate launch title."

The original plan was to create an F1 game using the technology, but this idea was soon dropped in favour of doing something far more accessible, based on a trend that was occurring in Japan's booming car enthusiast scene at the time.

"There was a trend among young people in Japan for tuning their cars," Namco Bandai general manager Yozo Sakagami





» Ridge Racer Revolution became a popular sequel not just due to having improved visuals and new modes but also thanks to its two-player link-up games only requiring a single disc to work.



>> NAMCO ON...

Why it decided to name cars after other Namco arcade games.

Sakagami: It was because of the deep affection of the development team towards Namco games. Most of them played videogames both in their personal and professional life at that time, and these people eventually became attached to Ridge Racer when they played it.

>> NAMCO ON...

Whether it was pleased with Ridge Racer's success on the PlayStation.

Sakagami: From the very first Ridge Racer until R4, they were developed for the PlayStation. During that period, we received the kind support of many players. I think the fact that Ridge Racer was a PlayStation launch title contributed a lot as well. At the beginning of the development, there was a time when there was some doubt as to whether any third-party could really develop a game on the PlayStation hardware. Around this time we had a meeting with the software engineering team, and when they showed us the first development build of Ridge Racer we felt certain that they really could succeed in making this game work on the PlayStation hardware. I believe that this played a big role, not only with Ridge Racer, but also in driving the overall development of games on the PlayStation.

tells us when explaining how the concept behind Ridge Racer originated, "and they liked to race on winding mountain roads. They didn't want to slow down when they took corners, so they started drifting their cars and crossing over the boundary line of the road. Of course, this is completely forbidden. At that point, we thought: 'Can we make a racing game in which the driver pushes his driving abilities to the maximum and gets a feeling of extreme speed?' So we created a game in which we let the player experience the sensations of manipulating a car at high speed and mastering corner drift."

While realism took a bit of a back seat, beneath Ridge Racer's colourful exterior, brash J-pop techno beats and videogame liveries roared impressive technical grunt and a keen focus on the thrill of the race. Its signature focus on drifting, which remains a staple in the series, allowed racers to experience the sensation of taking corners at breakneck speed while at the same time giving them the unnerving but equally exhilarating sense of momentarily losing control of their vehicle. Proof that Ridge Racer was never intended to

released the neGcon controller. Designed for racing games, it featured two twistable halves connected by a swivel joint that allowed the user to rotate each part for precision steering and drifting in the game. In addition to this, two analogue buttons afforded smooth and gradual control over acceleration and braking. A successor to the controller, the Jogcon, was later packed with special editions of Ridge Racer Type 4, offering force feedback and a unique jogging dial to mimic a steering wheel.

The PSone conversion of Ridge Racer introduced aspects that would become staples in the series, including mirror mode, a means to eke more from the game's single track by having players race it in reverse; a third-person camera; and additional cars to drive over the two in the arcade game. Garnering huge profits for arcade operators before becoming a popular launch game for the PlayStation, quickly sequels followed, beginning with an arcade sequel, Ridge Racer 2, in 1994. More an update of the original arcade game, Ridge Racer 2 featured no new tracks over the first game but added new aspects such as night driving, a rear-view mirror and, most notably, multiplayer.

"I think racing is an appropriate subject to try out the potential of new hardware"

MASANORI KATO

be a realistic driving simulator but designed to be a fun and exhilarating racing experience.

It was in April 1994 that work at Namco began on porting Ridge Racer to the PlayStation. The two biggest challenges the conversion team faced in porting the game to the machine was how to replicate the 'feel' on the PlayStation's D-pad controller, and also how to alleviate the issue of CD-ROM reading times, with Namco concerned that it would be an issue for console gamers spoiled on immediate cartridge gaming. Aware that it would be unable to fully avoid the latter issue, the team came up with a clever workaround: it would have the majority of the game data recovered at the start of the game, and as this data was being read would entertain users with a playable version of Namco's 1979 classic, Galaxian. Furthermore, beating it could unlock new cars in the main game.

Similarly, on the other issue of control, Namco knew that it would have to do the best with the tools Sony had given it, meaning the responsibility to improve the experience of Ridge Racer for PlayStation owners was its own. Therefore, shortly after Ridge Racer's launch in Japan, Namco

A proper sequel to Ridge Racer came the following year. Rave Racer ran on the same hardware as its predecessors but built on the original game brilliantly. Once again, players raced long and short versions of the original track, but this time two new circuits were added. These tracks, City and Mountain, were brilliant additions, with City inviting players to scud along a wide urban overpass embedded in an impressive cityscape, while the challenging Mountain stage could be seen as the opposite: a rural route that snaked through a beautiful rocky vista, decorated with valleys and canyons. Rave Racer also marked the first ever appearance of popular Ridge Racer race queen Reiko Nagase, though it wouldn't be until the release of Rave Racer that the character was officially named.

Considering how great a sequel Rave Racer was, it remains a bit of a mystery among fans as to why the game was never ported to the PlayStation. Knowing that a version was mooted and got to tech demo stage for high-performance PCs, we speculate that the reason might lie with technical limitations, but Sakagami puts us straight on the matter.

"Following the first Ridge Racer, the objective to convert the games to home consoles during development only came



after *Ridge Racer Revolution*. *Rave Racer* had already been developed at that time. This being said, it's not entirely true that *Rave Racer* was never converted to home consoles. In fact, we kept in mind the fact that there is a woman in the opening of *Rave Racer*. This was the introduction of Reiko Nagase. Also, the *Rave Racer* circuits were incorporated in the PSP *Ridge Racer* games, so the game hasn't been released for home consoles as a standalone, but over the course of time, all of its content has found its way into the *Ridge Racer* series."

PlayStation owners really didn't have cause to be too disappointed, though, as the console received its own exclusive sequel that same year. Despite improved visuals, two new vehicles and a couple of new tracks, *Ridge Racer Revolution* stuck close to the original template, particularly in terms of how you progressed through the game. The notable new things that Namco introduced in *Revolution* included two-player link-up races, made better by the fact that you only needed one copy of the game to set up a race, and the chance to adjust the speed level of your car, hinting at the customisation elements that would later be introduced. There are a few quirky aspects too, such as buggy mode and squeaky voiced commentary, and *Galaga '88* also replaced *Galaxian* at the start of the game.

In the same year that *Rage Racer* and *Revolution* were released, a third and pretty peculiar *Ridge Racer* game also came out in Japan. Aimed specifically at children, and seemingly inspired by the buggy mode in *Ridge Racer Revolution*, *Pocket Racer* was yet another reworked version of the original arcade game that featured deformed vehicles shaped like Choro-Q toy cars and simplified steering especially catered towards making the game more accessible.

For the next game in the series, *Rage Racer*, Namco swapped out the inviting, colourful aesthetics for more shiny, burnished and realistic-looking visuals. In keeping with this new sense of professionalism, Namco introduced the first ever career mode into the series too, in which players earned credits through winning races to spend on purchasing new cars and upgrading existing ones. Encompassing five different classes with a secret one unlocked at the end of the game, the career mode was notable for giving players three chances to successfully finish a heat, with failure to place third or higher in three tries clearing you of all the trophies you had earned inside that attempt but still allowing you to keep whatever cash and cars you had accumulated up to that point.

This release was then followed up by *Ridge Racer Type 4* the following year, which continued down that same road. The final *Ridge Racer* game to appear on the PlayStation, *Type 4* kept the

HISTORY OF RIDGE RACER



Mini making of Ridge Racer

Where did the concept for *Ridge Racer* originate?
First of all, it's important to state that *Ridge Racer* was developed to make use of some newly completed polygon-capable PCB technology, albeit in the form of a proper game. I think it's fair to say *Ridge Racer's* concept was an idea born from polygon PCB technology.

Is it true that *Ridge Racer* was going to use Formula 1 cars?

At that time in Japan, the thinking was, 'If you're going to make a car racing game, take Formula 1 as a theme', so at first we considered making *Ridge Racer* with Formula 1-style cars." But the result of that consideration was a number of different concepts which informed the final version of *Ridge Racer*: the game had to be 'on public roads', 'with machines like passenger vehicles', and it had to 'encourage players to use drift techniques'. If we had gone with a Formula 1 style of racing game, would *Ridge Racer* have been so loved by players?

Why did you make an arcade racer?

As people who know the game will appreciate, *Ridge Racer* is not a realistic 'driving simulator'. Of course *Ridge Racer* had a high level of programming technology and graphics techniques, but more than that, I think it was a game with a strong sense of good taste. Players back in the day were able to race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling, because it was a first-class racing game. It wasn't advanced simulation programming that made that possible, though – I think it was down to the advanced sense of game design.

Was there any competition with other arcade developers like Sega?

At that time, we were racing against one of our rival companies who also had a 'polygonal racing game' in development, so we were doing our best to make sure that our game was finished

first – even if by just one day – and was more entertaining. I think the other company was probably in the same position, racing against us.

How many people worked on *Ridge Racer*?

I can't answer this in detail, but the number of team members was much smaller than what most people would imagine.

Tell us about *Ridge Racer's* soundtrack.

Can you believe that initially we were planning to have no music in the game? *Ridge Racer's* music was produced at the same time as the game itself. We didn't have time in our schedule for a surplus of tracks to be composed, so that we could pick our favourites at the end of development – that just wasn't possible. We were lucky to happen upon danceable techno music for the BGM, which really helped with the process of creating this atmosphere where players could race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling.

Why did you create the original arcade cabinets?

The theme of the game was to put you in control of a high-power sports car, enabling you to hold the steering wheel to drive through curves and bends while skidding from side to side. Therefore, it was necessary that the steering wheel conveyed the response of the tyres in a way that players could actually feel. We had H-type gears, a clutch pedal, a large seat, and so on, all prepared so that the feeling of driving a real sports car could be conveyed properly."

Did you worry how *Ridge Racer* would be received outside of Japan?

In those days, we didn't really think in terms of 'intended for Japan' or 'geared towards the West'. We were developing *Ridge Racer* to make players experience a happy feeling, and that sense of happiness from playing games we felt was enjoyed by everyone in the global community of players.



more realistic tone and look of *Rage Racer*, but was enhanced by featuring gouraud-shaded visuals and an improved Grand Prix mode in which players got to pick a racing team and car manufacturer, and then competed in a series of races with their team, investing in new cars along the way.

Type 4 also had more vehicles than had been seen in any *Ridge Racer* before: an impressive 321, though made up of only 40 or so models. Unlocked fully by finishing every race in every possible combination of qualifying position, team and manufacturer, filling your garage with them all certainly took quite a bit of work, giving far more longevity to *Type 4* than previous instalments. Additionally, *Type 4* was the first in the series to offer split-screen multiplayer and to allow players to fully customise cars, and also broke tradition by introducing an alternative, more realistic, grip type of handling on top of the classic drift controls. Finally, packed with the game was a second disc that contained an enhanced version of the original *Ridge Racer* port. Dubbed *Ridge Racer Hi-Spec Demo* (or *Ridge Racer Turbo*), it was a truncated version of the game that ran at an impressive 60fps – twice the frame rate of the original – and

“Racing Evolution’s silly story spirals into a tale of rivalry, subterfuge and girl power”

featured enhanced visuals. It was a fantastic parting gift for PlayStation owners and made a brilliant sequel even more popular with fans.

From 2000 onwards, *Ridge Racer* received a large number of sequels, went portable, and even dipped its toe in realistic driving simulator waters. But before all that, it went multiformat.

Ridge Racer 64 was not only the first *Ridge Racer* game not to appear on a Sony machine, but also the first game in the series not to be developed by Namco, with the development handled by NST, a first-party developer for Nintendo Of America. *Ridge Racer 64* was basically a blend of *Ridge Racer* and *Ridge Racer Revolution*, as it repurposed the tracks in both games. It isn’t a complete two-game facsimile, however, as it adds a brand new track, a new career mode and improved driving mechanics by offering a choice of different drift mode options, one of which allowed your car to perform 360-degree spins. Add in the N64’s capacity to offer four-player single-screen multiplayer, and *Ridge Racer 64* certainly lived up to the impeccable standards of Namco’s entries.

Around the time that development on *Ridge Racer 64* was under way at NST, Namco was busy getting to grips with the soon-to-be-released PlayStation 2, and once again produced a *Ridge Racer* game to coincide with the machine’s March 2000 launch in Japan. Like the N64 game, *Ridge Racer V* also played things close to the first two PlayStation games. It saw a return to the uncomplicated arcade origins of the series, and the circuits harked back to the original game, featuring reworked versions of the Novice and Advanced courses in *Ridge Racer*. Given its clear arcade traits, it’s logical that Namco would choose to release a coin-op version of the game, and so *Ridge Racer V: Arcade Battle*, currently the last ever *Ridge Racer* arcade game, was released around the same time.

Following *Ridge Racer V*, Namco then produced a *Ridge Racer* spin-off title designed to subtly test how the series would perform as a realistic driving simulator. *R: Racing Evolution*, which was released for the PS2 in 2003 and later ported to the Xbox and GameCube, ignored *Ridge Racer*’s arcade heritage

by featuring intricate car customisation options, allowing players to alter myriad settings of each car, from body weight to wheels, and also incorporated a story into the racing. In the game you assume the role of an ambulance driver who, after impressing the head of a shady racing team by speeding an injured racer to the hospital, gets signed up to race for them. The story then gets even sillier, spiralling into a tale of racing rivalry, corporate subterfuge and girl power. It then gets a bit *Thelma & Louise*.

In 2004, the series first went portable with *Ridge Racer DS* and *Ridge Racer* for the PSP. The former was a faithful DS port of *Ridge Racer 64* that made use of the portable’s touch-screen controls as a steering method, while the latter was something of a ‘best of’, featuring tracks from previous PlayStation entries, but, most notably, the City and Mountain stages from *Rave Racer*. It also added in new vehicles, and introduced nitro boosting. A sequel followed in 2006, which kept to the exact same formula, once again featuring enhanced, repurposed tracks from the series but this time adding a few from *Rage Racer*.

Between these two PSP games, though, *Ridge Racer 6* became a launch title for the Xbox 360. As well as online racing, the most notable thing the game added was the slightly more autonomous means of progression. The game’s terribly named World Xplorer mode was a gradually unfurling career that allowed you to pick and choose the race you wished to enter, some of which featured differing race criteria such as no boosting, as you unlocked new cars and tracks along the way. An enhanced version of the game later appeared on the PlayStation 3 as *Ridge Racer 7*, featuring many of the same tracks but bringing in more vehicles as well as complete vehicle and bodywork customisation options. It also introduced a global ranking system that allowed players to post and compare their best lap times online. Oh, and it’s officially the first ever 3D *Ridge Racer* game, as in 2010 Namco released a 3D update for it.

Namco went all aboard with a full 3D game in 2011 with the release of *Ridge Racer 3D*. It’s an excellent little racer that once again returns the series to its early arcade and PlayStation roots. This tradition was followed in December when it released *Ridge Racer* for PlayStation Vita. The game received lots of criticism at the time due to its tiny track and car selection and a focus on downloadable content. Despite its excellent handling, many critics (including us) felt it was a poor addition to the franchise. Little did we know that we’d still be playing it many years later.

It’s sad then that the *Ridge Racer* story currently ends on something of a sour note. 2012’s *Ridge Racer Unbounded* instantly turned off many gamers because its destruction-based gameplay meant it didn’t feel like a proper *Ridge Racer* game. A selection of middling iOS games have also seen the series flounder and lost favour with fans. 2013’s *Ridge Racer Slipstream* is currently the last game in the series. Hopefully, Namco will get the series back on track in the near future.

>> NAMCO ON...

How important is the music to *Ridge Racer* games and how is it chosen?

Hiroshi Okubo: To embody the unrealistic speed and tension of *Ridge Racer* and the use of the latest computer technology, the most suitable music is techno, which gives an impression of energy, the journey and speed. Historically, a lot of early club music was launched that way. Consequently, we inserted the most recent music styles, matching the concept of every title. We made a point of creating an atmosphere the player could be immersed into. In each and every title in the series, we chose a simple keyword or image that we gave to the artists creating the soundtrack. Then each of them would be free to create music filled with a sensation of speed linked to that keyword. Comparing them all, we took the personal touch of each composer and created a *Ridge Racer* sound rich in variety. This time I told them: ‘I don’t care about the style, but lock down the spirit.’

>> NAMCO ON...

Why *R: Racing Evolution* never received any sequels.

Sakagami: The development of *R: Racing* was challenged by the following limitation: what are we going to do with yet another racing game from Namco when we already had *Ridge Racer*? So it became a game that offered a realistic driving experience, with real cars and real tracks. However, the players who were great supporters of *Ridge Racer* felt uncomfortable with this evolution. This is why we then reaffirmed the origins of what made *Ridge Racer* interesting and developed *Ridge Racer 6* instead of making a sequel to *R: Racing*.





» The Ridge Racer series has always been a supporter of reusing and repurposing tracks – it even did so in the games themselves with mirror mode.



» Series race queen Reiko Nagase was dropped for shiny new pit-girl Ai Fukami for Ridge Racer V. Ai wasn't popular with fans, and following an online poll Reiko was reinstated.

The games of Ridge Racer

We take a look at all of the Namco games that inspired the racing team names in the original Ridge Racer

RIDGE RACER (ARCADE)

Cyber Sled

Car #9 RT Cyber Sled

Another arcade game that saw early conversion to the PlayStation, *Cyber Sled* was a futuristic vehicular combat game – essentially a polygonal take on games such as *Tank* and *Battlezone* – in which players battled against either computer or human enemies using weaponised hover tanks.

RIDGE RACER (PLAYSTATION)

Solvalou

Car #2 RT Yellow Solvalou

Car #12 RT Blue Solvalou

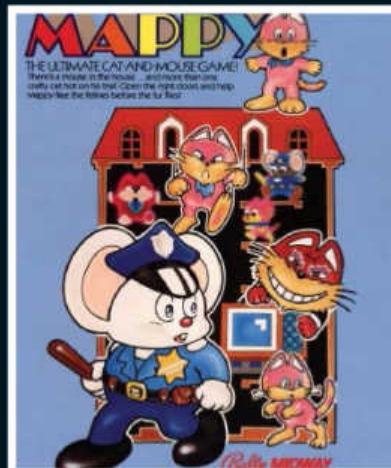
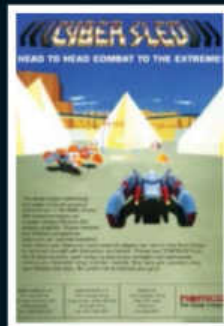
Xevious fans will be well aware that Solvalou is the name of the ship you pilot in the game, and true fans will know that it is also the title of the third game in the series. Despite its first-person viewpoint and 3D visuals, *Solvalou* sticks surprisingly close to the original 1982 arcade game. The game wasn't a massive hit, though, and so is a rare cab to come by these days.

Mappy

Car #5 RT Blue Mappy

Car #15 RT Pink Mappy

One of Namco's quirkier arcade games, *Mappy* sees you assume the role of a police officer mouse as he tries to retrieve stolen objects that have been hidden around the mansion hideout of a gang of criminal cats. Very likely to have been a game entirely based on that famous idiom, 'a game of cat and mouse'.



Galaga

Car #6 Galaga RT Carrot

Car #16 Galaga RT Plid's

This very popular sequel to one of the most successful coin-ops ever made, *Galaxian*, is a fantastic and tense vertical shooter that improves on the original game in pretty much all areas. Retaining the same insect alien-blasting as before, *Galaga* adds a number of interesting ideas and features to the mix, such as bonus rounds.

Nebulasray

Car #8 Nebulasray

This little-known top-down shooter was notable for using a distinct ray-tracing technique to generate impressive and realistic-looking 3D frigates and enemy vehicles. Gorgeous to look at, fans of the shooter genre should certainly investigate the game – be warned, however, that it can be a pig to emulate.

Bosconian

Car #18 Bosconian

A game that many have heard of but few have actually played, this eight-way shooter sees you steering a ship and trying to destroy a series of fortified bases that look like watermelons while surviving a co-operative onslaught of alien enemies and space rocks. It's notable for being one of the first arcade games to feature continue screens.

Xevious

Car #7 Xevious Red

Car #17 Xevious Green

Xevious is one of the earliest ever examples of the vertical shooter. It was also famed for its lush, vibrant-looking graphics and clever enemy AI, which allowed the game to be challenging without the need to fill the screen with enemies. In fact, the game is such a classic that it received two mentions in *Ridge Racer*, via *Solvalou*.



PERFECT!!

Dancing Stage EuroMix

"THIS IS THE BEST SHOW I'VE EVER SEEN!"

» RETROREVIVAL



» PLAYSTATION » KONAMI » 2001

The PlayStation played host to a variety of bizarre controllers, from the twisty neGcon to the one-handed ASCII Grip, but the novelty that took the market by storm late in the PlayStation's life was the dance mat. The

catalyst was Konami's *Dancing Stage EuroMix*, a localised version of the *Dance Dance Revolution* games that had already taken the world's arcades by storm, including my local Sega Park. It had been a perfect fit in arcades, providing the right mix of broad appeal and a platform for showmanship – people just couldn't resist having a go at *Word Up* or *Video Killed The Radio Star*.

When it finally arrived on PlayStation, I was very excited indeed – after all, the arcade game had proven an expensive habit for my sister and I to maintain at £1 a credit, and that was if we could even get on the machine. When we got it, we were disappointed to learn that the song list wasn't quite the same as that of the arcade machine, but that was quickly tempered by the fact that we could play it whenever we wanted and fail in the comfort of our own living room. We definitely became a lot bolder about picking harder difficulties and faster songs!

While I might have shown my newly refined skills in the arcade, if I was ever any good at *Dancing Stage EuroMix*, it was down to the PlayStation version. Now, if only those soft dance mats didn't break quite so easily... ★

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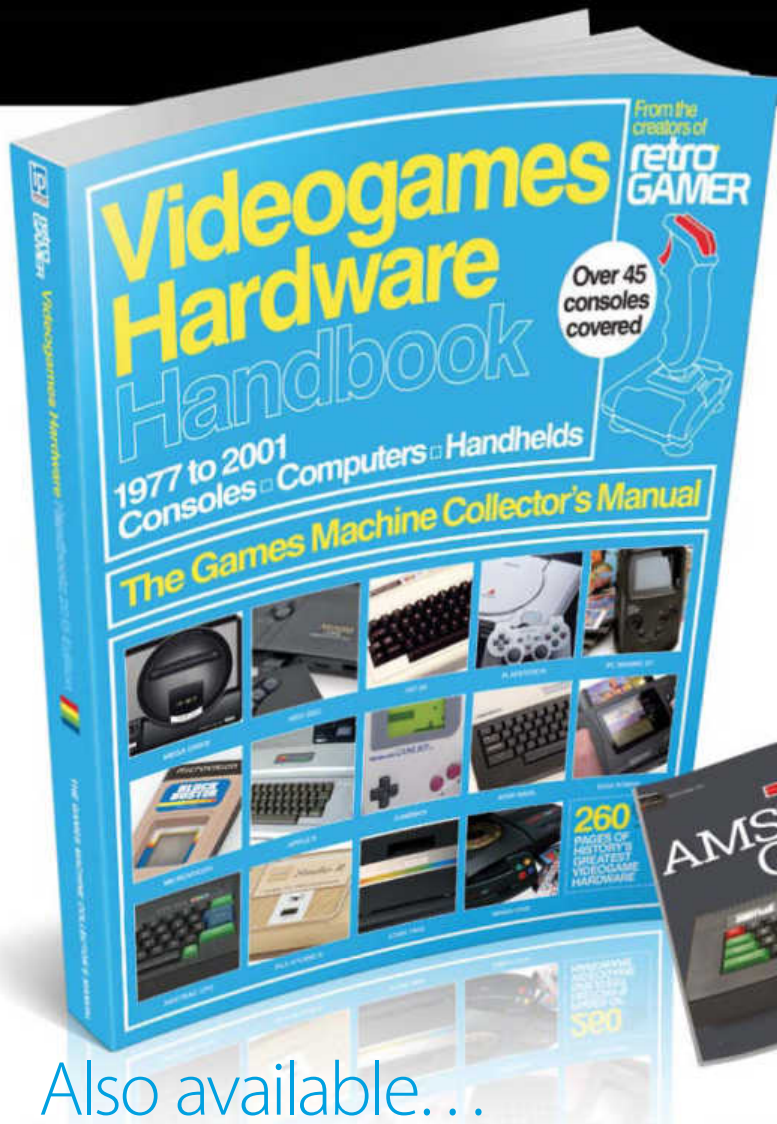
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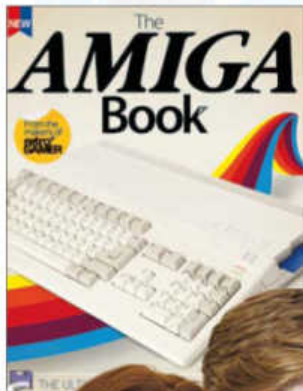


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